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Illinois Issues

May 2007 \$3.95

A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

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BURNING QUESTION

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Peggy Boyer Long



Do we have an obligation to help the poor? Can we end poverty?

by Peggy Boyer Long

For most of us, poverty is a grim statistic. For others, it's a personal narrative. And for some it's a moral imperative. John Wesley Fountain brings all three perspectives to bear in this month's Paul Simon Essay, *Burning question*.

Fountain grew up poor on Chicago's West Side in the neighborhood of North Lawndale, which he says is still among the poorest communities. He managed to move up and out of poverty, becoming a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, a staff writer for *The Washington Post* and a national correspondent for *The New York Times*, where he covered a 12-state region from Chicago.

Among his memorable pieces for that paper was an extensive report on poverty, including a profile of Illinois' Pembroke Township, a destitute community near Kankakee, where paved roads and running water are luxuries. Pam Koner, a mother in Westchester, N.Y., saw the piece and started an organization that has been sending food and clothing from New York state to Pembroke, and to Cairo, another impoverished Illinois town, for

"Perhaps the answer might be found in the stories and also in the voices of some Illinoisans who themselves live in the poorest communities in the state — among the poorest in America."

John Wesley Fountain



John Fountain's grandmother, and the church ladies who called themselves the prayer warriors, helped him move out of poverty.

nearly five years. (Who among us won't feel shame at hearing this?)

Fountain has been a guest essayist on National Public Radio's *This I Believe* series, and he's the author of *True Vine: A Young Black Man's Journey of Faith, Hope and Clarity*. The title comes from the name of his grandfather's True Vine Church of God in Christ, where, he writes here, he found faith, and "the church mothers also gave me all the tangibles for a faith-led exodus from poverty..."

He's now a professor of journalism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Most recently, he tells us, he's teaching memoir writing.

Fountain was, in short, the perfect choice for the question we wanted to explore in this year's Paul Simon Essay: What collective responsibility do we have for the poor?

Some of our readers might be a little surprised to read a first-person opinion essay in the pages of *Illinois Issues*, but we believe it's in the spirit of these occasional, commissioned pieces.

It's true that the magazine's mission has always been to publish in-depth reporting and analyses of policy

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questions, but we haven't consistently approached issues from an ethical or moral perspective. And rarely have we published first-person accounts on policy issues. But we think Simon would have liked this piece.

One of the magazine's founders, Simon had a deep interest in the moral and ethical dimensions of a wide range of issues, so the essay series we established in his name will take clear, and sometimes personal, positions about the state's collective responsibilities. We believe such ethics-centered essays will enhance public discourse.

Our first essay, *Civic virtues*, by religion and politics scholar Jean Bethke Elshtain, was published in May 2005. Supported by the Joyce Foundation, it examined why we have a responsibility to participate in the political process and explored ways to build a civic society.

We need to thank you, our readers, for digging deep and contributing generously to the Paul Simon Essay Fund, making this and future essays possible. We hope you'll be as moved by Fountain's piece as we were.

What, he asks, is our moral responsibility to the poor? "Perhaps

the answer," he writes of his tour from the southern tip of the state north to Chicago, "might be found in the stories and also in the voices of some Illinoisans who themselves live in the poorest communities in the state — among the poorest in America."

Yet his trip brings him full circle to his own childhood neighborhood, to the experience of growing up poor, to leaving poverty behind.

"I am reminded that the need here goes far beyond money," he writes. "I am reminded that growing up I was never really poor, just broke."

"Mostly, I am reminded of the pain of poverty, the lack I felt as a child and the feeling of that moment when I found hope — and how I know now that if I had not found hope, or had it not found me, I might not be here."

And for that reason, Fountain writes, when "faith, hard work and education" led him and his family out of North Lawndale and out of poverty, he vowed to remember that, "unless we all 'make it,' none of us ever truly makes it." □

Peggy Boyer Long can be reached at peggyboy@aol.com.



This is the northwest corner of 16th Street and Komensky Avenue in Chicago, a place known as K-Town, where John Wesley Fountain grew up in the 1960s and 1970s. The street is in the heart of North Lawndale, among the poorest communities in the state.

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A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield

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Credits: Our cover photograph was taken by John Wesley Fountain, a professor of journalism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He also took all of the photographs for his Simon Essay, *Burning question*, which begins on page 17.

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Illinois Issues is published by Center Publications
Center for State Policy and Leadership
<http://cspl.uis.edu>

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Subscription questions: *Illinois Issues*, Subscription Division, P.O. Box 2795, Springfield, IL 62708-2795 or call 1-800-508-0266.

Hours are 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday (except holidays). **Subscriptions:** \$39.95 one year/ \$72 two years/ \$105 three years; student rate is \$20 a year. Individual copy is \$3.95. Back issue is \$5. *Illinois Issues* is indexed in the PAIS Bulletin and is available electronically on our home page: <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>. *Illinois Issues* (ISSN 0738-9663) is published monthly, except during the summer when July and August are combined. Periodical postage paid at Springfield, IL, and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Illinois Issues*, Subscription Division, P.O. Box 19243, Springfield, IL 62794-9243.

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Bethany Carson



Outdated roads, rails and buses won't drive Illinois into the economic future

by Bethany Carson

"A modern economy needs a modern platform, and that's the infrastructure. It has been shown that the productivity of an economy is related to the quality of its infrastructure."

Felix Rohatyn
The New York Times, April 9, 2007

Felix Rohatyn helped save New York from bankruptcy in the 1970s when he chaired that city's Municipal Assistance Corporation. The former U.S. ambassador to France also has written plenty about the nation's need for public investment in its infrastructure. And Illinois politicians should note his most recent comments on the subject.

That's if they can shed some of the partisanship and refocus on their shared belief that infrastructure is linked to the state's economic well-being.

Charlie Wheeler, director of the graduate Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield, has monitored state politics and government since his days as a Statehouse reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Though he says politics don't necessarily trump Rohatyn's philosophy, he adds, "I think they're just ignoring it in that political questions seem to be more paramount."

That's been true for the past four years. The General Assembly hasn't approved a significant number of capital projects since Gov. Rod Blagojevich

Illinois also will risk losing available federal matching dollars and a competitive edge when Congress issues its next capital program for roads and mass transit.

took office in 2003, though the state has provided funding for some projects each year. As Wheeler says, the Illinois Department of Transportation never stopped paving the roads and building new ones, but "they've been limping along, finishing multiyear stuff that was approved in the past and doing the bare minimum to get by."

If lawmakers adjourn once again this spring without approving a capital plan, the state will postpone road and school construction projects and the jobs that go along with them. Illinois also will risk losing available federal matching dollars and a competitive edge when Congress creates its next capital program for roads and mass transit.

"I don't think the economy will grind to a halt," Wheeler says, "but there will be a cost in terms of added travel time, added wear and tear on vehicles using these roads that aren't up to snuff and

lost productivity time on the congested roads in the suburbs."

Meanwhile, nearly two dozen Illinois school districts sit on a waiting list for state funding to match local tax levies to build schools. Municipalities also need to upgrade water and sewer systems, particularly those serving the sprawling suburbs in the northern and central reaches of the state. And there's a need throughout the state to improve roads, rails, public transportation, parks, prisons, colleges and universities, veterans' homes, mental health facilities and state buildings.

Those capital projects are usually mapped out in a long-term capital budget, separate from the state's annual operating budget. The state pays for such projects over many years through borrowed money, federal grants, general state revenues and dedicated funds, such as driver's license renewal fees that help pay for roads.

Blagojevich has proposed two capital plans that have been denied by lawmakers. This year, he seeks legislative approval for \$4.5 billion in new bonding authority that gives priority to new school construction, economic development, renewable energy sources, public transportation and public universities. In addition, he wants to attract federal matching funds, particularly for mass transit.

Any significant capital plan requires agreement between Republicans and Democrats because a three-fifths majority is needed in both chambers to borrow capital funds. And no one is blameless for the long-running partisan standoff. Negotiation isn't the Democratic governor's strong suit. Democrats, who have maintained control of both legislative chambers since Blagojevich's first term, blame Republicans for withholding the necessary votes. And Republicans argue they're holding out for a proposal they consider fiscally responsible.

Last year, Republicans, who were excluded from budget negotiations altogether, said they oppose borrowing unless a revenue source is identified to repay the debt. Politically, they also feared capital funds wouldn't go to their districts.

Wheeler says Democrats used that technique 12 years ago, when Republicans controlled the executive branch under former Gov. Jim Edgar and the legislature under former Senate President James "Pate" Philip and former House Speaker Lee Daniels.

"So there's a lot of politics involved in it," Wheeler says. "Some of it is defensible in terms of policy. I think a reasonable argument can be made that when you are going to embark on borrowing, you should be able to identify where the money's going to come from to repay the loan."

Tom Ryder, a former House GOP budget negotiator from Jerseyville and a current lobbyist in Springfield, says compromise has always been difficult because minority parties "desire their participation to be extended beyond just the capital budget."

The dynamic changed, however, when Democrats gained enough seats in the Senate to approve a capital plan without GOP help. House Republicans are still needed for approval of a capital plan in that chamber, enabling them to withhold votes if they aren't satisfied.

In fact, earlier this session, House Republicans proposed their own \$5 billion capital plan using money generated by adding positions on existing riverboats. David Dring, spokesman for House Minority Leader Tom Cross of Oswego, says the caucus is willing to negotiate, given the dire needs for

And the feds might not feel inclined to give Illinois more funds if the state hasn't aggressively spent its earmarked dollars from the current capital program.

infrastructure around the state. "We're not locked [in] to the expanded positions," he says. "We're open to other options."

Something's got to give, he says. "Legislators are hearing greatly from their constituents, from the leaders of their municipalities, from business folks that there's a need for [projects]. I don't think legislators want to go home without some sort of capital bill with this budget. I truly believe that."

Ryder says three criteria need to be met for both parties from both chambers to agree on a plan: a dedicated and reliable revenue source, a level of trust and an agreement about where the money is going.

The General Assembly accomplished all three in 1999, when the state enacted a significant capital program called Illinois First, he says.

Illinois First matched federal funds and then some, says Linda Wheeler, who worked with the Illinois Department of Transportation for 28 years and now does consultant work for the Transportation for

A month is a long time to wait for news, but you won't have to wait that long for updates on state politics and government from *Illinois Issues*.

We'll keep you posted regularly through the end of this legislative session — no matter how long it goes — in our Web log, or blog, written from our Statehouse bureau.

Look for the bright orange banner at the top of the magazine's Web site: <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>.

Illinois Coalition, a labor and business advocate.

She says the state got the greatest bang for its buck out of federal earmarked funds through Illinois First, enabling the state to get the existing system back into repair, relieve traffic congestion and further economic development.

While Illinois First tapped into the existing federal road and highway program, that federal program will run out in 2009. Linda Wheeler says that puts Illinois in a position to create another plan to attract federal capital funds when Congress writes its next capital bill.

But those funds pay for much less than the actual cost of finishing the projects, she says. And the feds might not feel inclined to give Illinois more funds if the state hasn't aggressively spent its earmarked dollars from the current capital program.

Illinois transit is at a worse disadvantage in competing with other states for federal money, she says. Illinois funds the Regional Transportation Authority and 50 other systems, but for the past three years, the amount of state funding for transit capital projects has been \$0. When the feds look at states that have matched their transit funding, Illinois doesn't fare well against the competition.

"Illinois is coming to the table without cash," she says.

Blagojevich proposes a \$425 million authorization for bonds over three years, geared toward getting those federal transit dollars. But, she says, given the cost of inflation on such construction materials as cement, oil and diesel, Illinois transit would still lose out in the global economy.

If Illinois goes one more year without a capital plan, the state will continue to delay the projects that improve infrastructure that established it as a national hub in the 1920s, says Jim Nowlan, a former state lawmaker and a senior fellow at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois.

"To go four years without a capital construction bill is — I wouldn't say it's a crime — but it's a travesty that risks diminishing the capacity of our infrastructure to produce the wealth that infrastructure generates." □

Bethany Carson can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

ON THE ROAD

The governor pitches his tax-and-spend plan

Gov. Rod Blagojevich took a week-long statewide "Investing in Families" bus tour last month in an effort to garner support for his proposed budget plan. The crux of his plan for next fiscal year is health insurance for all Illinoisans and more funding for education, but the plan hinges on approval of a controversial business tax. He proposes to tax business revenues instead of profits. The so-called gross receipts tax would replace the corporate income tax.

"We have a unique opportunity to fundamentally reform the way state government meets its responsibilities so that middle-class and working families are at the center of what we do," Blagojevich said in a printed release as he prepared to depart Chicago. "For decades, working families have shouldered more and more of the tax burden while the wealthiest corporations in our state have paid less and less."

Blagojevich rallied support from health care, education, small business, religion, government and labor advocates as he stopped in Rockford, Quincy, Peoria, Avon, Galesburg, East St. Louis, Alton, Marion, Champaign, Decatur and Danville between April 2 and April 6.

Some of the small business owners who participated in the rallies were recruited through state agencies, according to The Associated Press.

Businesses that generate less than \$2 million would be exempt from the new tax. Larger agricultural and manufacturing operations oppose the tax.

Southern Illinois University President Glenn Poshard was quoted in the governor's April 4 Alton press release: "This plan is bold; some see it as controversial, but in my humble opinion, it is an opportunity to move this state forward by finally recognizing that public investments in education and health care are fundamental obligations of a democratic society that ought not depend on where a young person is raised or where a senior citizen becomes sick."

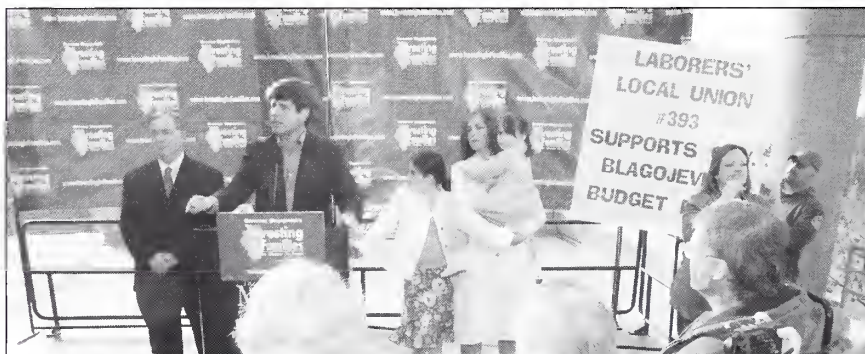
The governor faced some critics, though. He was booed in Quincy, according to an Illinois Radio Network reporter who covered that stop.

Bethany Carson

Photographs courtesy of Brent Hanson of Illinois Information Service



Gov. Rod Blagojevich speaks to a crowd of 300 people gathered at the Laura Lee Fellowship House in Danville on the fourth day of his "Investing in Families" tour.



State Rep. Mike Boland of East Moline shares the stage with the governor, his wife Patti and their daughters Amy and Annie at a rally attended by 200 people in Moline.



The governor signs a poster after a speech to more than 200 people at Alton City Hall. Deputy Gov. Sheila Nix is beside the governor.

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

Legislative checklist

The spring session, which goes into high gear this month, could stretch beyond the constitutional deadline of May 31. Major tax proposals to reform the state's education funding system and to provide near-universal health care top the list, but lawmakers have other business to attend to as well. Here's a sample of legislation to watch.

Statewide smoking ban

The Senate approved a measure to ban smoking in public places throughout the state. If successful in the House and signed by the governor, smoking in restaurants, bars and student dormitories would be illegal. Also, smoking within 15 feet of public entrances and exits would be prohibited. The measure aims to level the economic playing field between municipalities that have approved local bans and those that haven't.

HPV vaccine

A measure to require 11- and 12-year-old girls to receive a series of shots designed to prevent human papillomavirus, a sexually transmitted disease, has stalled in the Senate. However, that chamber approved a separate piece of legislation that would require the Illinois Department of Public Health to give parents information about the link between cervical cancer and HPV. Parents also would be given information about the availability of the HPV vaccine, and the state would make the shot available in 2011 to any female age 18 or younger who wants to be vaccinated.

A similar measure in the House also calls for parents to be educated about HPV, but it would require parents to document whether their children received the series of shots.

Assault weapons ban

Manufacturing, selling, purchasing and possessing a semi-automatic weapon would be illegal in Illinois under measures before both chambers. Individuals who already own such guns would have 90 days to document ownership with the Illinois State Police. Gun owners would have the right to transfer ownership to family members, a licensed dealer or a buyer in other states. Anyone found in violation could face felony charges.

Criminal code

The state's criminal code would be condensed and simplified for the first time in 40 years under a Senate measure. Proponents say it would help trim the number of lengthy and costly appeals in the judicial system. A panel of law experts spent nearly two years drafting recommendations for clearing outdated, unconstitutional and redundant parts of the law.

Construction board

State officials gave themselves more time to decide whether the hospital construction review board should continue to exist. The board oversees construction projects proposed by hospitals, nursing homes and emergency centers, a process designed to cut down on wasteful spending. The governor signed the measure to extend the deadline to sunset the Health Facilities Planning Board from April 1 to the end of this month, the constitutional deadline of the legislative session.

Nurse-to-patient ratio

Under a House measure, hospitals would have to satisfy a state-established ratio for the number of patients assigned to each nurse on duty. The measure aims to ensure patient safety and curb overtime. The ratio would vary from ward to ward depending on the level of care needed.

Teen driving safety

The House is considering a measure that would prohibit drivers younger than 19 from talking on their cell phones while behind the wheel. Exceptions would be made in cases of emergency.

Mandatory HIV testing

Three House measures call for mandatory HIV testing of prison inmates and school-aged teenagers.

HIV testing would be required for children 13 and older and would be included in school physicals unless parents decline. A separate measure would require the Illinois Department of Public Health to establish HIV testing schedules for older teens.

Inmates would receive HIV tests upon entering the Illinois prison system. If results

were positive, the Illinois Department of Corrections would be responsible for the inmate's medical treatment. Upon release, the financial responsibility would transfer to the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services.

Primary election date

A measure to move the state's primary election date from the third Tuesday in March to the first Tuesday in February won House approval. If the measure is successful in the Senate and the governor signs it, Illinois voters will play a role in choosing presidential candidates before the primaries are over in other states. House Speaker Michael Madigan proposed the measure to benefit presidential hopeful Illinois U.S. Sen. Barack Obama.

Ethics reform

Two measures in the House and Senate are intended to drive a wedge between money and political favors.

One measure sponsored by Rep. John Fritchey, a Chicago Democrat, would prohibit state employees from receiving perks from individuals seeking state contracts. Legal, banking and consulting fees would be prohibited under the measure. Individuals seeking state contracts worth more than \$10,000 would have to disclose their campaign contribution history. The state comptroller also would have the power to refuse payment to contractors not in compliance with disclosure rules.

A second measure in the Senate would require the state's executive officers to disclose all contracts worth \$50,000 or more. The names of the contractors and individuals those contractors have financial relationships with would be posted on the office's Web site.

Civil unions

Same-sex couples would be allowed to form civil unions under a measure sponsored by Rep. Greg Harris, a Chicago Democrat. If the measure wins approval, those couples would have a right to the same benefits and protections as married couples. Only three other states — Connecticut, New Jersey and Vermont — allow or acknowledge civil unions.

Deane Williams-Harris

KA-CHING Court costs add up

Gov. Rod Blagojevich likes to break the mold with his initiatives and executive orders, but legal fees are mounting as some of them land in court.

For instance, three initiatives have been challenged in court and have cost the governor's office and state agencies \$665,037.75 in legal fees. And that doesn't count the costs of establishing and marketing the programs.

Video games *Blagojevich wanted Illinois to be the first to ban the sale of sexually explicit or violent video games to minors, but the Entertainment Software Association sued. In December 2005, a federal judge ruled that a state ban would violate First Amendment rights.*

Between September 13, 2005, and August 30, 2006, six state agencies were billed for **\$458,117.22** in legal fees payable to attorney Michael Kasper.

Flu shots *During a 2004 shortage of flu vaccine, Blagojevich tried to buy more than 254,000 doses from Europe's Ecosse Hospital Products Ltd. without federal approval. The bill comes to \$2.6 million for Illinois, which Comptroller Dan Hynes refused to pay because the U.S. Food and Drug Administration didn't allow the vaccine to enter the state. The case is pending in the Illinois Court of Claims.*

Between October 4, 2004, and May 9, 2006, the governor's office and three state agencies were billed for **\$63,317.75** in legal fees payable to Zuckerman Spaeder LLP.

I-Save RX *Blagojevich created a state prescription drug program for Illinoisans to receive cheaper refills from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration never approved the program. The governor expanded it to state employees last fall. A special audit by the Illinois auditor general's office says, in addition to legal fees, the program cost \$599,000 to implement and market.*

Between October 1, 2004, and June 30, 2005, three state agencies were billed for **\$143,602.78** in legal fees payable to Zuckerman Spaeder LLP.

SOURCE: Office of the Illinois Comptroller

House approves driver's certificates for immigrants

Undocumented immigrants are one step closer to being able to drive legally in this state. The Illinois House approved a measure that would give people who don't have Social Security numbers a chance to apply for driver's certificates. The measure is designed to help the state educate immigrants about the rules of the road and cut down on the number of uninsured drivers.

"This bill is not about helping undocumented citizens legitimize themselves," says the legislation's chief sponsor Rep. Edward Acevedo, a Chicago Democrat. "It's a bill about law enforcement and road safety."

The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights estimates that about 250,000 drivers in Illinois can't obtain driver's licenses or buy auto insurance because they lack Social Security numbers.

Acevedo says his measure also would ease the backlog in traffic court and county jails for driving without licenses and function as a safeguard for law enforcement during traffic stops.

Opponents say giving driver's certificates to undocumented immigrants would simply reward them for breaking the law. Policy analysts at the libertarian Cato Institute also say the certificates create a false sense of safety because knowing a person's identity doesn't necessarily reveal his or her intentions to law enforcement.

But Greg Sullivan, executive director of the Illinois Sheriffs' Association, says, "This [driver's certificate] is for hard-working people who are waiting to become citizens of this country, who are working and want to take their children to school, who want to get to work without being stopped and without being thrown in jail."

States gained the ability to issue driver's certificates when the federal Real ID Act became law in 2005. The certificates would have to look different from regular driver's licenses, and they would not satisfy Real ID requirements to board airplanes, enter federal buildings or buy firearms.

Applicants would need to show valid taxpayer identification numbers issued by the Internal Revenue Service, valid passports and documents verifying their identities and addresses. They also would be fingerprinted and digitally photographed. If they didn't buy auto insurance within 30 days of applying, the certificates would be revoked. The certificate would cost \$60.

The measure took years of tweaking before gaining enough support in the House with 14 Republicans and 46 Democrats voting to approve it. If the Senate approves the measure and the governor signs it, which he said he would do, the law would take effect next January and sunset after five years.

Deane Williams-Harris

Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights



About 2,500 people filled 40 buses to attend a rally and wave American flags in the state Capitol March 22. They were showing support for a measure that would allow immigrants to get driver's certificates. The House approved the measure and sent it to the Senate a week later. Supporters also urged legislators to earmark \$25 million for expanded English classes.

Number and percent of individuals who are uninsured, 19 to 64 years of age, by state Senate district: 2005

DISTRICT	SENATOR	NUMBER	PERCENT
ILLINOIS		1,405,923	18.9
1.....	Muñoz.....	44,767.....	37.6
2.....	Delgado.....	44,852.....	33.9
3.....	Hunter.....	32,629.....	27.1
4.....	Lightford.....	28,080.....	22.2
5.....	Hendon.....	30,982.....	24.5
6.....	Cullerton.....	23,122.....	13.8
7.....	Ronen.....	31,018.....	21.4
8.....	Silverstein.....	19,866.....	15.9
9.....	Schoenberg.....	14,470.....	12.0
10.....	DeLeo.....	21,916.....	17.1
11.....	Viverito.....	22,922.....	18.0
12.....	Sandoval.....	41,883.....	33.8
13.....	Raoul.....	33,733.....	26.2
14.....	Jones, E.....	28,198.....	22.8
15.....	Meeks.....	26,187.....	21.6
16.....	Collins.....	33,976.....	28.4
17.....	Trotter.....	34,191.....	27.7
18.....	Maloney.....	20,288.....	16.3
19.....	Crotty.....	20,140.....	15.8
20.....	Martinez.....	39,564.....	28.9
21.....	Cronin.....	13,638.....	10.9
22.....	Noland.....	29,901.....	22.3
23.....	Pankau.....	19,577.....	14.6
24.....	Dillard.....	13,986.....	10.6
25.....	Lauzen.....	18,121.....	14.1
26.....	Peterson.....	16,814.....	13.0
27.....	Murphy.....	15,135.....	11.4
28.....	Millner.....	17,275.....	12.7
29.....	Garrett.....	14,961.....	12.1
30.....	Link.....	25,964.....	21.5
31.....	Bond.....	20,565.....	15.7
32.....	Althoff.....	19,961.....	15.4
33.....	Kotowski.....	15,914.....	12.3
34.....	Syverson.....	24,617.....	19.5
35.....	Burzynski.....	23,577.....	18.8
36.....	Jacobs.....	21,216.....	17.1
37.....	Risinger.....	19,097.....	15.8
38.....	Dahl.....	19,571.....	15.9
39.....	Harmon.....	27,536.....	21.2
40.....	Halvorson.....	23,071.....	18.8
41.....	Radogno.....	14,689.....	11.5
42.....	Holmes.....	31,731.....	24.8
43.....	Wilhelmi.....	28,821.....	23.3
44.....	Brady.....	20,055.....	16.0
45.....	Sieben.....	19,620.....	16.2
46.....	Koehler.....	20,106.....	16.8
47.....	Sullivan.....	20,687.....	17.5
48.....	Hultgren.....	17,656.....	13.6
49.....	Demuzio.....	19,711.....	16.9
50.....	Bomke.....	20,268.....	16.2
51.....	Watson.....	19,872.....	16.5
52.....	Frerichs.....	26,974.....	21.3
53.....	Rutherford.....	20,199.....	16.8
54.....	Jones, J.....	20,684.....	17.5
55.....	Righter.....	22,264.....	18.3
56.....	Haine.....	21,221.....	16.9
57.....	Clayborne.....	23,416.....	19.3
58.....	Luechtefeld.....	22,469.....	18.5
59.....	Forby.....	22,199.....	18.6

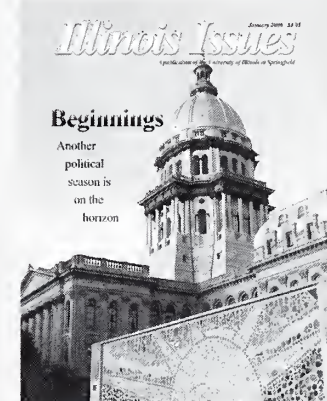
SOURCE: Health & Disability Advocates and Rob Paral and Associates

Health & Disability Advocates and Rob Paral and Associates developed estimates of uninsured Illinoisans by state legislative districts. These estimates of uninsured households are categorized by poverty level and age. In 2006, the federal poverty level for a family of four was approximately \$20,000. The high numbers in districts with large Hispanic populations are related to undocumented noncitizens living in poverty, says Stephanie Altman, programs and policy director for the nonprofit organization.

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IT'S A GAS

Ameren to study hog manure potential

Waste recycling could take on a whole new meaning if Ameren's research pans out. The Midwestern utility company's Renewable Energy Department is partnering with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the University of Illinois at Chicago to investigate the possibility of using methane emissions from pig manure to generate energy.

If the idea proves feasible, a pilot project would be implemented at The Maschhoffs Inc., a large swine farm in downstate Carlyle. An anaerobic digester would be installed to harness and accelerate the manure's decomposition. The methane released would be collected and used to power a generator. The electricity produced then could supply a significant portion of the farm's peak electricity demand of more than 700 kilowatts.

If successful, the project also would help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Ameren could then receive renewable energy credits, which would be used as an offset if gases that contribute to global warming are regulated later at the federal level. Methane's impact on the atmosphere is 21 times greater than carbon dioxide.

"The fact that these energy or offset credits are locally generated is also a benefit to the region, rather than buying credits from another state or country," Paul Pike, strategic analyst for Ameren, stated in a press release.

The state Environmental Protection Agency helped Ameren choose the hog farm as a supplier of manure, and the university will provide about 12 percent of the funding for the feasibility study. Researchers hope to conclude the study by the end of this month. Until then, they won't know if the idea is more than hot air.

Vera Leopold

Photograph courtesy of The Maschhoffs Inc.



STATE RANKINGS

Obama backs election scorecard

National college rankings give schools powerful motivation to improve their stats. Now, based on an idea developed by a Yale Law School professor, U.S. Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois is proposing a similar system to prompt states to improve their election systems.

The so-called democracy index, proposed by Heather Gerken in an article published in the January issue of *Legal Times*, would rank the performance of states' elections based on a number of quantitative indicators, such as how long voters waited in line, how many voting machines malfunctioned and how many ballots were discarded.

"In the end, a ranking system would work for a simple reason," Gerken wrote. "No one wants to be at the bottom of the list."

Obama's legislation would create an Office of the Voter Advocate within the Election Assistance Commission that would create and manage the index and issue recommendations and grants to states. A pilot program to collect data in select states would begin in 2008.

"Without a single additional federal regulation, this scorecard could provide a powerful incentive for states to improve our democracy," Obama said in a printed statement.

After the contentious 2000 presidential election, Congress approved and the president signed the 2002 Help America Vote Act. The law aimed to reform the federal election process through new mandates for state administration of voting, such as the replacement of punchcard and lever systems with electronic voting machines. But it hasn't fixed

continuing problems, says Gerken.

"There's not even a set of standards that are shared across the board for what constitutes a well-run election," she says. "The practices of states are wildly different. We don't even have the basic information to know how well things are going."

The scorecard would provide a metric so objective comparisons could be made among states, Gerken says. "The hope is that it will jump-start a bigger conversation about reform."

Such an index would have some inherent difficulties, according to Kent Redfield, political studies professor and interim director of the Institute for Legislative Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield. Some states, such as Oregon and Washington, where most ballots are cast by mail, would be hard to score. And Obama's legislation mainly focuses on problems that occur on Election Day, not on problems with earlier parts of the equation, such as voter registration.

But, Redfield says, an index would be an effective driver for states to change "when you're at the low end of the scale."

The same week Obama's legislation was introduced, another presidential candidate, Sen. Hillary Clinton of New York, proposed a study of the costs and benefits of creating an index.

While Democrats introduced both measures, Redfield agrees with Gerken that the idea should have appeal on both sides of the aisle. "I think there can be a broad consensus that there's a problem," he says. "There really isn't any way to make a partisan argument about making sure that people have the opportunity to vote and that their votes are accurately and fairly counted."

Vera Leopold

As demand grows, aid shortfall looms

Financing for wastewater treatment projects might not be an issue that typically commands public attention. In fact, a low-profile program has existed for two decades. But if federal contributions to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund continue to drop in the face of growing demand, the need will be high-profile, say Illinois community and agency officials.

Illinois' annual federal funding has declined considerably, says Geoff Andres, section manager of infrastructure financial assistance in the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's Bureau of Water. After peaking at about \$90 million in fiscal year 1996, Illinois' funding dropped to \$61 million by 2001, and the proposed appropriation in the 2008 federal budget is only \$30.9 million.

Meanwhile, population growth, new federal regulations and aging mechanical systems for sewage and other wastewater treatment in many of the state's communities have increased the need for new and bigger projects.

"Demand is not easing, and new demand is coming up on the horizon," says Andres.

The assistance fund was established under the Clean Water Act. It provides federal funds to finance water quality protection projects with required 20 percent matching state funds. States then loan borrowers up to 100 percent of their project costs, to be repaid into the fund at low or no interest rates over as many as 20 years.

President George W. Bush's administration is attempting to phase out the program so states will rely only on their own appropriations.

But eliminating federal dollars would throw off the state-federal partnership integral to the Clean Water Act and leave communities without an important source of assistance, says Linda Eichmiller, executive director of the Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators, a national nonpartisan organization. "Cities face daunting fiscal challenges. And basically who benefits from [the wastewater systems] are the people who live downstream, so it's a public benefit," she says.

Small towns often seek revolving fund loans because of their limited budgets, but larger cities struggle to finance water infrastructure as well, given the many other local needs competing for funding. This is the case in the Quad Cities area, which will need more than \$200 million in water and sewer infrastructure work over the next five years, according to Tom Hart, senior vice president of governmental affairs with the Quad City Development Group, a nonprofit organization of regional business and economic interests.

Representatives from the group traveled to Washington, D.C., in March to meet with members of the Illinois and Iowa congressional delegations, in part to discuss the region's infrastructure crunch and to advocate fuller funding of the clean water loan program.

Hart estimates communities in the Quad Cities area soon may see rate increases of 150 to 200 percent in order to meet the costs of water system renovation and construction.

Andres of the state environmental agency says the federal shortfall hasn't been felt by localities yet because of some skillful juggling at the state level. In 2002, and again in 2004, the agency leveraged the funding program and sold bonds to help meet demand.

"If money continues to tighten," Andres says, "we will be getting into situations where somebody will want a loan in August, and we're going to have to say no."

Vera Leopold



NEW WEBSITE Gearing up for 200th birthday of Illinois' favorite son

The Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission launched a Web site this spring to keep the public in tune with events planned around the state to mark the 16th president's 200th birthday in February 2009. The site, www.lincoln200.net, will be updated as new events are scheduled.

Winners of a first round of grants to support programs aimed at celebrating the bicentennial will be awarded this month and posted on the site. The grants are available to museums and historical, educational and cultural organizations; local communities and municipalities; nonprofit institutions and governmental agencies. They will focus on education, interpretation and special events.

Another cycle of grant funding will be announced for the next fiscal year starting July 1, says Kay Smith, coordinator for the Illinois Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. "Our main concern was to get the Web site up and active to let people know about the grant program." The next round of grants, she says, will offer more detailed information.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich established the commission in February 2006 to promote knowledge, understanding and engagement in the life of Abraham Lincoln through preservation of Lincoln sites, publications and observances commemorating the 200th anniversary of his birth. The commission, which operates with support from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, works with local, state and national agencies and organizations to coordinate bicentennial events.

Beverley Scobell

DRUNK DRIVING

Lawmaker wants standard markers

Photograph courtesy of Shelly Anderson

Homemade roadside memorials for victims of drunk driving accidents would be replaced with standard markers under a measure sponsored by state Rep. Susana Mendoza, a Chicago Democrat.

The legislation, which was approved by a House committee in mid-March, would allow families of individuals who die in drunk driving accidents to apply to the Illinois Department of Transportation for a memorial at the site of the accident.

The state-sanctioned signs would make the problem of drunk driving more visible and serve as a reminder to people on the road, says Charlene Chapman, executive director of the Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists and member of the Tina Ball DUI Memorial Taskforce, which helped push the legislation forward.

"We wanted to have something that's dedicated to victims and also a prevention tool through public awareness," she says. "It's not just a warning sign; it's a warning sign with a personal message."



A homemade memorial marks the spot where three girls from Wanbonsie Valley High School in suburban Aurora were killed when their car was hit by a drunk driver in 1997. Families could apply for standardized markers of fatal drunk driving accidents under a proposed bill.

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The memorials would be no more than three feet tall and two feet wide and would read "Please don't drink and drive," followed by "In Memory of," the victim's name and the date of the accident. The family would pay a one-time service fee, to be determined by the transportation department. Memorials would be maintained for at least two years, then removed and given to the family.

Erecting homemade memorials such as crosses, wreaths and flowers on busy streets can pose a hazard to those placing them and to drivers passing by who may be distracted by the displays. Line-of-sight problems also can occur, says Mike Claffey, a department spokesman.

Some jurisdictions remove homemade memorials after a certain period of time, but the department has no formal policy. Claffey says the department is neutral on the idea of standardized memorials.

"Our thing is we just want to make sure the roads are safe."

The DUI Memorial Taskforce, a group made up of representatives of agencies and advocacy groups that deal with the issue of drunk driving, is named after Tina Ball,

a construction zone flagger and mother of seven who was struck and killed by a drunk driver while on the job.

Dorothy Brown, clerk of the Cook County Circuit Court, formed the task force in 2004 to examine drunk driving legislation and recommend changes after she saw Ball's family wearing homemade shirts listing laws they wanted to see passed. If the memorial legislation is successful, it would be the second law proposed by the task force to be approved.

Chapman says some families may not want to wait for a standardized memorial or may not want one at all. "We have a very diverse society," she says. "The crosses have a lot of meaning to family and friends."

But Brown says she hopes seeing the memorials would have an impact on individuals who tend to drive drunk and on young people who may start to make that choice.

"Right now, [memorials] are silent, and these families are suffering," says Brown. "You hear the statistics, but people don't really focus on them. This would be an actual visual for people to see." *Vera Leopold*

State commission wants to sell more student loan assets

The jury is out on whether the Illinois Student Assistance Commission can sell more of its \$4 billion student loan assets and what it can do with the money generated by such sales.

Last year, the agency grossed \$35 million from a previous sale of a portion of its student loan portfolio. Gov. Rod Blagojevich won approval to use money from those types of sales to pay for a new grant program for college students from middle-income families.

Commission Director Andrew Davis says the loan portfolio lost \$7.5 million last fiscal year. "We need to get out of a business that we don't know what we are doing in," he said during a House committee meeting in March.

The loss prompted the commission to petition for the right to sell about 80 percent of its existing loan assets.

Rep. Chapin Rose, a Mahomet Republican, said companies wouldn't exchange \$35 million for a portfolio that wasn't making a profit unless they thought a gain was on the horizon.

"Someone thought those portfolios would make money," he said during the committee hearing.

Davis blamed the loss on "predatory companies" swamping

students with deals to consolidate their loans at lower interest rates. The state then lost out on collecting expected interest payments, he said.

In committee, Meegan Dugan Bassett, senior policy associate for Women Employed, a Chicago-based advocacy group, said further sales might jeopardize the commission's programs that help low-income students go to college.

Davis said those programs would continue and added that the sale would allow the state to provide loans at a lower interest rate than the federal student loan program. He also said the sale would generate additional revenue for the state's college grant programs.

Committee Chairman Rep. David Miller, a Lynwood Democrat, opposes grants to middle-income students. "I don't know if it's smart to award grants to affluent families because of student merit when we have low-income families that need assistance."

Davis said he hasn't been approached by any groups or legislators on how the state could spend the new revenue.

Before the final decision, the bipartisan legislative Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability will hold hearings this spring and consult with an independent financial analyst.

Deanese Williams-Harris

BOOK SHELF

High-profile trials often resonate years beyond the verdicts

In May, 121 years ago, an unknown assailant threw a bomb into the midst of a peaceful labor rally at Haymarket Square in Chicago. Eight men were convicted of murder and conspiracy to commit murder; one committed suicide in jail; four were hanged; three were pardoned seven years later by a governor who knew that act would end his political career.

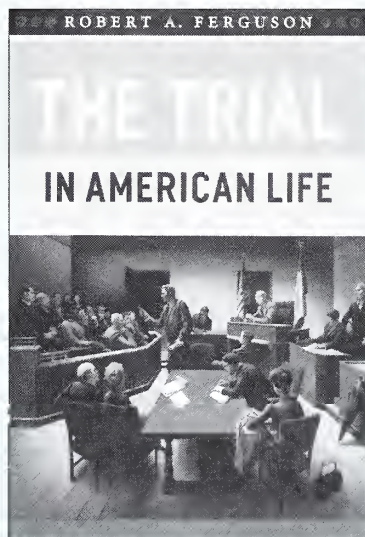
The trial of the foreign-born labor leaders has been described as one of the most unjust in the annals of American jurisprudence, and law professor Robert Ferguson uses the case as one example of the ways in which the emotional, cultural and political effects of high-profile cases can resonate for decades.

The Trial in American Life was published this year by the University of Chicago Press. Ferguson, the George Edward Woodberry Professor of Law, Literature and Criticism at Columbia University in New York, argues in his book that high-profile trials, ranging from Aaron Burr to O.J. Simpson, provide an essential forum for discussion of contentious issues.

In the case of the Haymarket trials, Ferguson writes, the law that was so poorly rendered in Cook County continued to dominate public opinion for years, in Illinois and across the nation. "Anarchism," he writes, "had been identified as the enemy to be fought, and punishment of it would remain a trump card of political opportunism for the foreseeable future."

On a wave of public sentiment against those who were not American-born, the presidential campaign of William McKinley

and Theodore Roosevelt successfully linked William Jennings Bryan to John Peter Altgeld, Illinois' first foreign-born governor and the one who tried to right a legal injustice that was upheld all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.



"The spread of intolerance from the Haymarket affair remains its most extraordinary contribution, also, for the reader of today, its most disturbing effect," he writes. "Blunders of the law in one local courthouse led to a national deterioration in intellectual exchange, a debasement in general political discourse and a collapse in fundamental levels of public civility everywhere."

In answering his own question — How could one legal decision cause so much damage across the entire nation? — Ferguson writes that "courtrooms are the visible platforms that bolster or undermine the American rule of law, and the price of failure in them can be incalculable."

He carries this and other historical examples into the present, addressing the issue of modern press coverage of courtrooms. He argues that television coverage, when used to serve the court rather than the media, allows the public to see and understand trials so that justice is ensured.

"A high-profile trial that either upsets, divides or defines major aspects of a community should probably be televised. A people under a rule of law in a democratic republic have the right to know as accurately as possible what concerns them, and a properly televised trial promises the greatest accuracy."

Beverly Scobell

REPORT

Latino adults less likely to go online

A new Pew Center report finds that 32 percent, just one in three, Latinos who speak only Spanish use the Internet, compared to 78 percent who speak English only and 76 percent who are bilingual.

The growing Hispanic population in the United States now makes up 14 percent of the adult population, yet the study finds that just 56 percent of Latinos go online. That compares to 71 percent of non-Hispanic whites and 60 percent of non-Hispanic blacks who use the Internet.

The report, written by Susannah Fox of the Pew Internet & American Life Project and Gretchen Livingston of the Pew Hispanic Center, attributes the gap to several socioeconomic factors that often are intertwined, such as low levels of education and limited English-speaking ability.

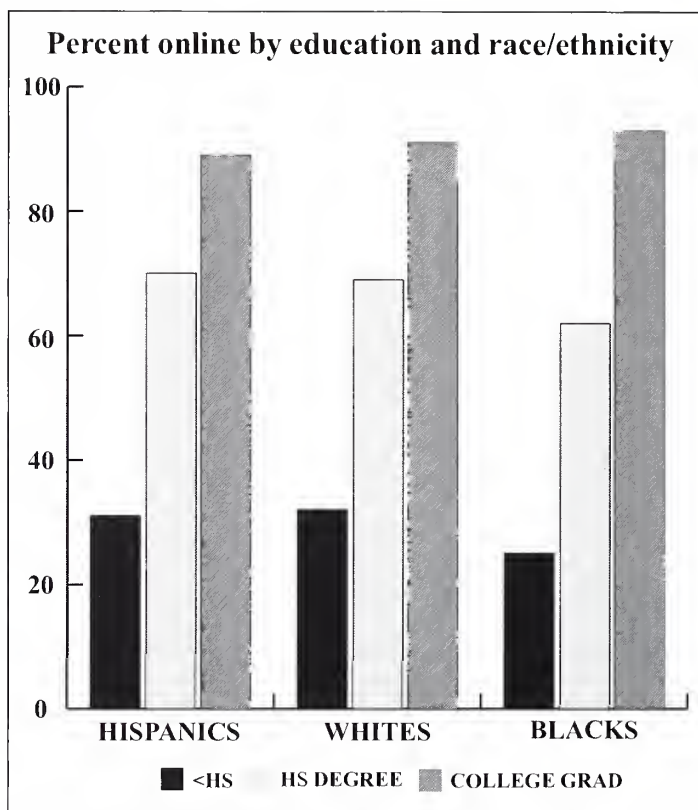
"The incredible effect of language and education on the likelihood of Internet use was really robust and persistent, even when we used statistical methods to control for other factors that could also be playing a part," says Livingston.

College-educated adults, regardless of race, have about a 90 percent Internet usage rate. Conversely, decreased Internet use is equally uniform across races for those without a high school degree — around 30 percent. However, four in 10 Latino adults have not finished high school, compared to one in 10 non-Hispanic whites and two in 10 African Americans.

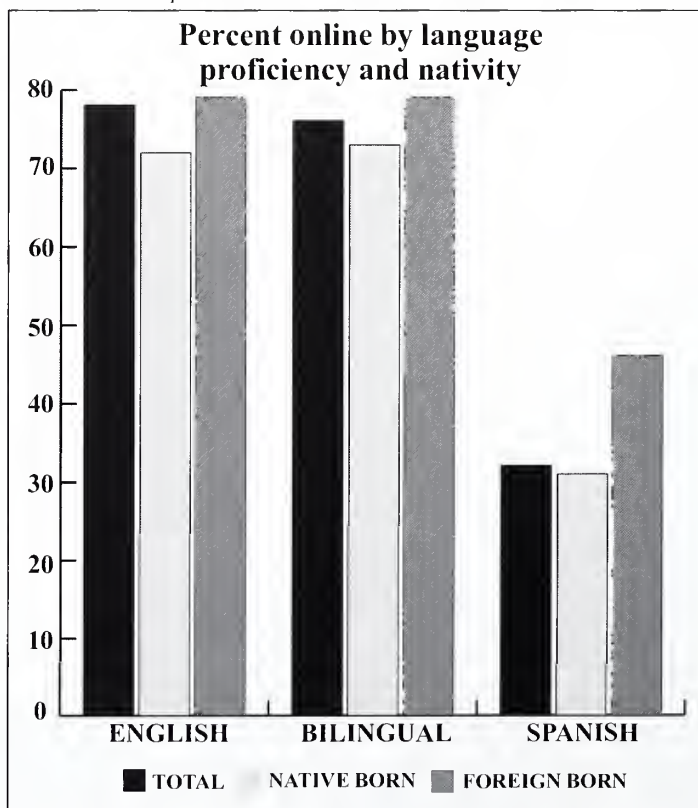
Some of the disparity also can be related to language, but analysis of the data shows a link between being born outside the 50 states and a decreased likelihood of using the Internet. There also is decreased use of the Internet associated with being Mexican, the largest national origin group in the U.S. Latino population. Only about half — 52 percent — of Latinos of Mexican descent go online. Illinois has the third-largest Mexican population in the country.

However, Latinos are a young population with nearly twice as many adults under 40 than among whites. Ongoing studies by the Pew Internet Project consistently show that younger Americans across all ethnic and racial groups are more likely than their elders to use the Internet. Second-generation Latinos, the sons and daughters of immigrants, are the likeliest group to go online. Fully 80 percent of second-generation Latinos use the Internet, compared to 71 percent of third-generation Latinos. This seems significant because the native-born segment of the Hispanic population is projected to grow more rapidly than the immigrant group.

Beverly Scobell



SOURCE: Pew Hispanic Center



SOURCE: Pew Hispanic Center

BURNING QUESTION

*How to help the poor?
The answer might be found in the stories
and the voices of Illinoisans who themselves live
in the poorest communities in the state*

Essay and photographs by John Wesley Fountain

The Paul Simon Essay

We are pleased to publish *Illinois Issues*' Paul Simon Essay. And we are grateful for the generous financial support of our readers, which made possible this contribution by journalist, author and professor John Wesley Fountain of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Our goal in commissioning these essays is to find new ways to frame policy questions.

One of the magazine's founders, Simon had a deep interest in the moral and ethical dimensions of a wide range of issues. Though the magazine's mission has always been to publish in-depth analyses of policy questions, we have never consistently approached policy from an ethical or moral perspective. But these essays will be distinct in that they will take clear positions about the state's collective responsibilities. This theme will be the thread that ties the project together over the years.

This month, we explore the moral dimensions of poverty and our responsibility to the poor. This is a subject that interested Simon, who devoted his life to public service. □

I stand with one foot in each of two worlds. One in poverty, the other planted firmly in the American Dream. One man, with one soul and one dream borne in two Americas.

I stand forever — at least in the scenes that play over in my mind like a grainy, black-and-white silent movie — on the impoverished block of 16th Street

and Komensky Avenue in a community called North Lawndale, still among the nation's poorest, on Chicago's West Side, a place affectionately called K-Town. I also stand, in part, on an otherwise obscure plot of farmland in downstate Pulaski, where my great-great-grandfather — a thin, God-fearing man with chocolate skin, born a slave —

reared his family as a free man in a rural town on the fringes of the Great Emancipation, through the misery of the Great Depression, in the depths of a great ocean of poverty.

I stand eternally with one foot on Poverty Street USA and the other on the American Dream, forever rooted in the fertile soil of this Land of Lincoln where the Bible Belt and the Midwest-bred, hard-work ethic intersect like a tapestry of purplish dawn sky over an emerald prairie.

Forever is my penchant for her flat, sun-drenched fields, golden or straw-brown or cornstalk green, to be spied across miles of highway. Forever is my affinity for the amber glow of the setting summer sun that stretches across fluttering tops of wheat and grain fields that tickle the horizon. Eternal is my love for this land, which runs so rich and yet so poor, with pockets of the most depraved poverty known to mankind still.



Poverty crystallized along once-busy Commercial Avenue in Cairo, at the southern tip of the state.

Poverty. It is the perennial question. American Poverty — rural, urban and suburban poverty. Stubborn poverty, the kind that rises like the stench of polluted well water.

In Illinois, poverty is a seamless and never-ending tale.

It runs from the state's southern tip in emaciated Cairo and Pulaski, where my family's roots lie, north through Kankakee County's Pembroke Township — an impoverished rural community less than an hour's drive south of Chicago that I visited and wrote of in 2002 as a national correspondent for *The New York Times*. Farther north it runs to a hobbled hamlet called Ford Heights — once deemed the poorest suburb in America. And farther north still to Chicago and its confederation of impoverished inner-city communities, where high-rise public housing complexes were for decades symbols of acute isolationism, America's warehousing of the poor.

Poverty. It is the perennial question. American Poverty — rural, urban and suburban poverty. Stubborn poverty, the kind that rises like the stench of polluted well water. Poverty. Its assortment of interconnected questions lingers, none more pressing than these: What is society's moral obligation to the poor? How can we solve this problem called poverty? Is it indeed solvable? What to do about the poor?

Across America, 37 million people lived in poverty in 2004, an increase of 1.1 million over a one-year period, according to a recent U.S. Census report. According to the *2006 Report on Illinois Poverty*, published by the Illinois Poverty Summit, 1.56 million Illinoisans, or 12.4 percent, live in poverty. Of those, 723,753, or 5.7 percent of the state's total population, live in deep poverty.

Among the report's most alarming

conclusions was that, while it found Illinois to be the wealthiest state in the Midwest, it had the highest poverty rate (12.5 percent) since 2002 among seven other Midwestern states, and also posted the highest child poverty rate (17.7 percent) in the Midwest since 2000. The report concludes that "one in four people in Illinois lives near poverty, enough Illinoisans to fill the states of Montana, Idaho, North Dakota and South Dakota combined."

Among Illinois' poorest communities are Cairo, Pembroke, Ford Heights and North Lawndale, where the poverty rate in each is nearly three times the national rate of 12.4 percent, U.S. Census figures show. In fact, the number of people living in poverty in Ford Heights and North Lawndale quadruples the national rate.

For me, no issue in the 21st century resonates more profoundly than the poor.

Perhaps the answer might be found in the stories and also in the voices of some Illinoisans who themselves live in the poorest communities in the state — among the poorest in America. Or perhaps poverty is too complex a question, and in the end, the answer too elusive, even after a journey that begins at the state's southern edge on Interstate 57 and ends hundreds of miles north.

Perhaps the portrait of poverty that emerges over the course of that journey

is in itself vivid enough — human enough — to see the malignant state of the poverty of us all, given that so many — far too many — of us still dwell in that tenuous and wretched state that smells, according to Zora Neale Hurston, "an awful lot like death."

*There is poverty of the pocket.
And poverty of the soul.
Poverty of the spirit.
And poverty easy to behold.
Poverty that runs and festers
Like Langston's Raisin in the Sun.
And poverty that lingers —
A brand of which the sum is
Only more poverty.*

John W. Fountain

Once, I was waxing on to my grandfather about some poverty expert whose book I had read when suddenly my grandfather, in his sometimes sobering dry wit, remarked:

"Hey, John, let me ask you something."

"Uh-huh," I said.

"This poverty expert ... Tell me, uh, was he ever poor?"

"Uh-h-h," I responded, racking my brain for the answer. Finally, I gave up.

"I don't know," I answered, laughing out loud. "Probably not."



Kristy Tillman pours milk from one container to another as she prepares for children to arrive at the after-school program sponsored by Two Rivers Ministries, where she is program director.

"Then how in the world can he be an expert on poverty if he was never poor?" Grandpa asked with a chuckle.

We both laughed, his point well taken.

As I have reflected on Grandpa's point over the years, I still don't know that my having been poor makes me an expert on poverty. What I do know is that I am at least in some ways richer for the experience.

I hated poverty. I hated the explosion of gunshots that cracked the still quiet of night and that seemed as inevitable as the rumble and rickety-click of a train passing over steel tracks somewhere in the distance.

I hated the debilitating combination of poverty and hopelessness so evident in the winos that sipped spirits outside liquor stores down on 16th Street and in the people I knew who had long given up on life.

I hated the feeling of lack, never more intense than when I stared into the cold emptiness of a refrigerator, or when my younger sister and I had only sugared water and ketchup sandwiches as treats. Sometimes as a little boy, I filled my belly with water to quell my hunger pangs, so much that if I swirled, swiveled or shook, I could hear the water swish inside me.

As a boy, I vowed someday to escape poverty. I also vowed never to forget where I had come from and that I must somehow find some way to help those left behind.

That sense of obligation was a moral one that was as much a result of my own agony as a child, which nurtured in me a deep-seeded belief that no child, no person, ought to have to live in poverty. That those of us with means — those who dwell in the life-issuing waters of the American mainstream instead of America's drained streams — ought, as the Bible says, to bear the infirmities of the weak.

Even as a child, I got the sense that the measurement of our own wealth as a society, as human beings, ultimately must



Jessie Mae Walker, a member of Church of the Cross who oversees this end of the Family-to-Family connection, keeps track of the boxes as they are distributed to needy families. Family-to-Family, a New York-based not-for-profit hunger relief program, provides monthly food, clothing and other essentials to 13 communities across the country, including Pembroke Township and Cairo.

factor into the equation the health and wealth of those left to languish in the shadows of poverty.

That sense was also instilled in me by a God-fearing mother and grandparents who insisted that Sunday is the Lord's day, but more importantly, by the Gospel of Jesus Christ whose message of peace, good will and healing offers the greatest hope to the poor. The Son of God born in a lowly stable, come to redeem a world in which the masses of common men and women faced poverty, denigration, discrimination and degradation was a message that as a poor black boy I found appealing. It spoke to me of the possibilities that existed in a God, who my grandmother Florence Hagler taught me supersedes all the devices, the evils and the avarices of man.

My family's prescription to me for poverty was to hold fast to faith and to get a good education. My grandfather, George Hagler, a blue-collar, God-fearing pastor who worked for many years as a U.S. Postal Service letter carrier, put it more simply:

"Get your learning, but don't lose your burning."

My fire against poverty still burns. But at age 46, the solutions now seem more elusive than at age 9 when a few bags of groceries would have solved all the problems of my poverty-laden world.

Inside a plain, single-story, brick building that once housed St. Joseph Catholic School, a group of college students exchanged goodbyes and a last prayer after a week of working to make a difference in Cairo. Within the prayer circle inside this makeshift sanctuary on Cross Street, now the headquarters of Two Rivers Ministries, Kristy Tillman and her parents Sharon and Gary Tillman stood one recent afternoon, holding hands in this vineyard where they believe God has called them to minister to the poor.

Kristy, the program director, who grew up in Springfield, Mo., once dreamed of being a missionary in "some far-off land,"

but admits to finding her calling much closer to home. An outgrowth of a youth ministry, Two Rivers for the past five years has been Kristy's vehicle for trying to help heal the "darkness."

That darkness, she says, stems from the poverty crystallized here by the dilapidated shells of brick buildings that run along Commercial Avenue, which once flowed with businesses and shoppers — with life. By the absence of even a McDonald's. By the tangible sense of hopelessness that grips this once-thriving, but now decaying, mostly black riverfront town of about 3,000.

Even more stark is the poverty the Tillman family has witnessed staring back from the eyes of people who lack not only substance, but also hope.

For Kristy, poverty is, in a word — lack. "Poverty is connected to the darkness," she adds.

And yet, in a way, she also sees a certain degree of poverty as being a potential blessing. "There's a dual function of poverty in the spiritual realm," Kristy adds. "There's a lack that creates good need, and there's a lack that creates desperation."

For the staff at Two Rivers, a Christian faith-based ministry that runs a computer center as well as an after-school program for children and provides food, clothing and other services to people who live in

Cairo and other surrounding communities, the abundance of poverty is God's opportunity to meet people's needs. And while they attempt to address this community's insufficiencies in substance, their primary focus is less material and more spiritual.

"Poverty has very little to do with that money thing," says Gary Tillman, Two Rivers' executive director. "It's more of the spirit and the attitude about your life and your future, your identity.

"The root problem is spiritual," he adds. "It's internal."

To that end, prayer is at the heart of Two Rivers' efforts. Prayer on the street as the Tillmans and volunteers engage in what they call prayer walking. Prayer outside the courthouse. Prayer in the homes of people in the community who invite them in when they come knocking. Prayer in the 24-hour prayer room at the center.

"Even by my good works, I can't transform people," Sharon Tillman explains. "It's only by His holy spirit that there's going to be true transformation, not by giving people more food or whatever. That's never going to do it."

And yet, not far away, Hannah House — a two-story, white frame bungalow in disrepair that not long ago was covered with trees and wild brush and weeds — now stands as a symbol of the power of prayer, faith, hope, work and a desire to heal the poor. The house, which the ministry is renovating as a shelter for children in Cairo, still needs a lot of work, including a new roof and driveway, a lawn mower, a weed eater, furniture and supplies, a kitchen sink and faucet, a bathroom sink and a wish list of other essentials.

But there is one thing absent from the Two Rivers wish list: Hope.

I hated the shame of poverty, of having to wear my cousins' hand-me-downs — the sinking feeling of pulling food stamps from my pocket to pay for groceries at the corner store, evidence that we were on welfare, and the subsequent teasing I faced later from friends who spotted me.

Early on, I was introduced to the harshness with which people treated the poor. I became familiar with that penetrable stare of disdain and the sense that it was standard course to

blame the victim. I was so keenly aware of the tendency of those beyond the walls of poverty to be judge, jury and executioner when it came to poor folks. That we poor folks were lazy no-good-for-nothings who had no one to blame but ourselves for our lot in life.

My own childhood poverty was the product of a mix of factors, not the least of them being the desertion by a father who gave me his DNA, but little else, and the forces of life in a neighborhood that spiraled south, sucking away lives, vitality, hope. That is not to make excuses. It was just the way life was in my hood: simple, hard, plain. You lived. Or you died.

There existed in my neighborhood the living and the living dead — those for whom the official pronouncement of death had not yet come but whose inebriated existence of cheap wines and drugs left them hollow-eyed and stumbling in the light of day.

Brown cardboard boxes stacked neatly on a white tiled floor, in corners. Dozens upon dozens of brown rectangular boxes inside the Church of the Cross, situated just off the "blacktop," one of the few paved roads in Pembroke Township,



Theresa Hodge White looks into the eyes of her daughter Theresa. A former addict, White has been clean and sober for four years and says, "I just keep my faith."

where some live in crumbling houses with caked dirt floors and no running water.

The outsides of some boxes bear small flower decals. Others handwritten notes: "Love." "Peace."

"I hope you like are gifts," reads another box, the note written in the dark blocky penmanship of a child.

In the top left-hand corner of many boxes in the spot reserved for sender is the typewritten insignia that reads: "Family-to-Family. Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y. 10706."

The boxes, from hundreds of miles away, also have in common their destination: One family or another in Pembroke. They have been arriving for nearly five years now, ever since Pam Koner, a mother in Westchester, N.Y., saw a *New York Times* story about Pembroke and started the organization that now links families in well-to-do suburban communities with families in impoverished rural communities. The program, which provides monthly food, clothing and other essentials, has grown to include 13 communities across the country, including Pembroke and Cairo.

Residents of Pembroke, like Jessie Mae Walker, a member of Church of the Cross who oversees this end of the Family-to-Family (F2F) connection, say that even a grass-roots effort goes a long way in a town where there is no police force, no natural gas pipeline, mostly sand and gravel roads and, for many here, no clear sign that life in Pembroke will be getting better anytime soon.

Despite Pembroke's persistent problems, Walker, who has been married 18 years and has five children, says, "It's beautiful." She relishes the common sight of white-tail deer, of red-tail foxes, rare species of birds, of grazing Black Angus cows and starry country nights.

"Sometimes I hate that people don't see what I see," Walker said recently at Church of the Cross, where she distributes the F2F boxes to Pembroke families who arrive to claim theirs on a frigid snowy day.

"People come out here and they want to portray us as lost or hopeless," she adds. "We were a thriving town at



John Barnes and barber David Jackson discuss money inside Positive Image barbershop in Ford Heights. Barnes, who grew up in Ford Heights, often returns to his hometown to patrolize his friend Jackson, who says he continues to operate his barbershop in Ford Heights to "service the community."

one time where we had grocery stores, a Dairy Queen, and a Chinese restaurant and a cleaner's and several gas stations."

What happened?

The evaporation of resources, the disappearance of jobs, unfulfilled and broken promises by government officials, the loss of hope and dreams, some around here say, the flicker of new possibilities that too soon fizzle after yet another news story has shed light on the plight of the people of Pembroke and the latest round of empathetic visitors has come and gone.

"They came, but they didn't deposit," Walker says of many of those well-meaning people who visited Pembroke after the *Times* story. "I'm seeing the same thing with Katrina victims. For a minute, while the camera is here and the famous people are there, the notoriety is there and stuff, but after a while, they don't continue on."

For Theresa Hodge White, born and raised in Pembroke and a volunteer with F2F, as well as a recipient, the toughest thing about poverty is "being black and poor." What makes it worse is that "there are so many people out here on drugs,"

she says. "A lot of mothers are on it." Ecstasy, crack, alcohol.

"That's when you lose your faith, when you turn to drugs," White says. "That's the main problem — loss of hope, loss of faith."

She knows firsthand, as one in a family of 18 children who grew up poor in Pembroke, and who also as an adult was addicted to drugs for 20 years. At her worst, as a crack addict, she remembers shriveling to little more than 70 pounds on her six-foot-one-inch frame.

"I thought I was going to die with a pipe in my mouth," she says. "I was convinced."

Getting caught with a gun, and standing before a judge in a moment of clarity with her life and her children's fate hanging in the balance, was her turning point.

"I don't mess with no drugs, no alcohol," says White, sober four years. "Now since I've been clean, I'm steady getting blessings. I got all my kids, my oldest two are in the military."

Can we ever completely heal poverty?

"I don't know," White answers. "I just keep my faith."

That much was clear as she stared smiling and sober into the eyes of her youngest daughter, Theresa, 6.

The problem of transforming the ghetto is, therefore, a problem of power — a confrontation between the forces of power demanding change and the forces of power dedicated to preserving the status quo.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

As a child, I watched as more fortunate neighbors and members of my own extended family — aunts and cousins — managed to grab hold of the bootstraps to the American dream. I watched with mixed emotions each time someone pulled away from our block for the last time — loaded down with their belongings bound for the suburbs. I didn't know whether to cry or to rejoice. Mostly I cried.

Eventually, I grew wary of the idea that someone might someday return with a lifeboat for us, bitter over the reality that few men seemed to be their brother's keeper, embittered by the overwhelming

I increasingly got the sense that the world didn't care about the poor, that "we" were someone else's problem — the millstone to be cast aside, the eyesore to be hidden from public view.

evidence that the farther and longer folks were removed from the travails of life in the 'hood, the less likely they were to send back a search party, or even remember that there were those of us who also needed saving. In a sense, everyone was seeking in some way or another to escape. And everyone who escaped physically, even the churches that took suburban flight, also became, in a sense, de facto defenders of the status quo.

I increasingly got the sense that the world didn't care about the poor, that "we" were someone else's problem — the millstone to be cast aside, the eyesore to be hidden from public view, society's great drain that, after decades of drinking its resources, seemed no less intractable. That is what the *Chicago Tribune* concluded in its 1985 Millstone series on my neighborhood, adding that this so-called permanent underclass "devours every effort aimed at solving its problems." That it is "a class of misfits." That it "resists solutions both simple and complicated."

The understanding, even as a boy, that I must somehow "save" myself was my sobriety from self-indulgent self-destruction, though not entirely. At 17, I became a father, by 19, the married father of two boys, and by 22, I was on welfare with three children and short on hope and faith. Until I found faith on my knees at my grandfather's Truc Vine Church of God in Christ in teary morning sessions with Grandmother and the little old ladies who called themselves prayer warriors.

The church mothers also gave me all the tangibles for a faith-led exodus from poverty: love, support, community, a few

dollars here and there to help tide my family over and their example of finding contentment in their circumstances, no matter how dire, and their mastery of walking and living with dignity, even when they didn't have a dime.

So when my moving day finally arrived one Sunday in August 1984, and my faith, hard work and education led me and my family finally up — away — from K-Town, I carried with me a vow to never forget, and also this one truth: That unless we all "make it," none of us ever truly makes it.

I was living in North Lawndale when the *Tribune* reported its series. Not one in its army of reporters ever talked to me. But a few years later, I walked into the *Tribune* newsroom a full-fledged reporter — proof that there is hope beyond the dismal reports of so-called poverty experts.

The hair clippers buzz like a swarm of hornets inside an airy barber-shop on Main Street in Ford Heights



A blue police light glows high on a lightpost on the southwest corner of 18th Street and Kildare Avenue, yards from a church and the playground of a West Side elementary school that John Fountain attended as a child.

where sunlight spills by the bucketsful through clear glass windows.

Barber David Jackson is hard at work inside Positive Image barbershop. He is an optimistic 34-year-old entrepreneur in a town where there seems more despair and reasons to flee to greener pastures than to keep his business here on a block-long stretch of Lincoln Highway — Ford Heights' version of Main Street — which seems to be dying if not already dead, dotted with liquor stores and one auto shop. But stay he does in this South Chicago suburb notoriously impoverished and dubbed as the "poorest suburb in America" in the 1980s by the late Pierre deVise, formerly an urbanologist at Roosevelt University in Chicago.

Jackson and others here say not much has changed over the past two decades, unless you count the steady cycle of economic decline, even in the shadow of a Ford Motor plant just up the street. A thin, mustachioed man, Jackson grew up in Ford Heights and sees his decision to remain as being his contribution to his community.

"Ford Heights is in desperate need of businesses," he says while cutting a child's hair one afternoon. "And the least I can do is to stay here and service the community the best way I know how, which is to cut hair."

But for others, it has become clear that the way up in Ford Heights is an escape from Ford Heights, with its lingering state of despair, punctuated by the absence of jobs and the sense here that it has become a town forgotten, at least one left to languish.

Chicago attorney John Barnes knows well the escape route. Raised here in poverty in a housing project by a single mother, and the eldest of four, he used education to climb the socioeconomic ladder. His motivation: "The fear of coming back, and not having an alternative."

"My people grew up in poverty," he explains, standing in Jackson's barbershop one Sunday with his son Destin, 10. "I had to finish school. I had to."

Having worked as an attorney for the legendary Johnnie Cochran, Barnes now runs his own successful practice in downtown Chicago, though he often makes his way back to Ford Heights, where he has provided free legal advice to residents



A withering building that stands on 16th Street just west of Komensky Avenue in North Lawndale was a barbershop when John Fountain was a boy.

and where he still patronizes his friend at Positive Image. But Barnes' visits home are often filled with mixed emotions.

"It's kind of ambivalent," Barnes admits. "It's not necessarily a good feeling coming back and seeing things have gotten worse. But by the same token, the people here, the people I grew up with, my friends, I feel like it's home. I feel like it's family.

"I can always come here and be comfortable," he adds. "When you grew up in a situation, you're ingrained in it and that's always a part of you."

Standing on the corner of 16th Street and Komensky Avenue on a gray Sunday afternoon in April, with both feet planted firmly in this decaying world, I too am home again, though light years from my days of poverty and ketchup sandwiches and dreams of planning a great escape.

And yet, there is a sense of loss, a sense of sadness that pricks like the icy rain that soon begins to fall as I take in the scene — signs of decimation so inherent in the countless withering houses with their

boarded windows or tattered rooftops, in the abundance of debris-strewn vacant lots where houses once stood, where people once lived, and in the lighted or color-splashed signs that advertise liquor, lottery and Link.

I climb back into my car and drive west on 18th Street and Keeler Avenue toward First Baptist Church where I used to attend Boy Scout meetings as a child, just a few yards from the playground of Roswell B. Mason, where I attended elementary school. I find some solace here in that these institutions still stand, appearing, at least on the outside, whole. But even here, the blue glare of a flashing Chicago police video camera mounted high on a light pole, just a few yards from a yellow school crossing sign, reminds me of how poor my old neighborhood remains in one sense and how much poorer it has become in another.

It also reminds me of the need to come around this way more and of the need to continue to make contributions in tangible ways. It reminds me that there is some boy or some girl here and in other places like this destined to drown in a sea of poverty unless I — unless we — find

the commitment, compassion and moral fortitude to ensure some basic essentials, if only for our own posterity, to all people, regardless of color, creed or race. Among these: universal health care, decent housing, food and water, equal access to education and equal opportunity to earn a decent wage. That we must ensure these as Illinois' promise, as America's promise, simply because it is decent, it is moral and it is humane.

And yet, as I drive this afternoon, spying a group of young men with fists filled with dollars as they encircle another young man kneeling on the ground, shaking and rolling the dice, I am reminded that the need here goes far beyond money. I am reminded of how Grandmother and the prayer warriors — long before the house in the suburbs and the BMW and my middle-class climb — taught me, no matter how great my poverty, to live in dignity, to stand proud, to live in the ghetto, but to not allow the ghetto to live in me. I am reminded that growing up I was never really poor, just broke.

Mostly, I am reminded of the pain of poverty, the lack I felt as a child and the feeling of that moment when I found hope — and how I know now that if I had not found hope, or had it not found me, I might not be here.

That is the reality that washes over me in waves of mixed emotion as I drive back to my other world through the cold and rain. □

John Wesley Fountain

He is a professor of journalism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Previously, Fountain was a national correspondent for *The New York Times*, covering a 12-state region from Chicago. He also was a writer for *The Washington Post* and a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*.

As a Michigan Journalism Fellow at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, he studied inner-city poverty and race.

He was an essayist on National Public Radio's *This I Believe* series and is the author of *True Vine: A Young Black Man's Journey of Faith, Hope and Clarity*.

Displaced

Tougher rules for Chicago's subsidized housing aim to sweep social problems away from the city's new mixed-income communities but they threaten to send those problems elsewhere

by Deane Williams-Harris

Photograph courtesy of the Chicago Housing Authority



Park Boulevard, one of the new mixed-income communities being developed throughout Chicago, replaced the Stateway Gardens housing projects.

The social ills that once plagued Chicago public housing can be eliminated with a few swings of a wrecking ball. Drug dealing, gang shootings, economic isolation and squalor will be displaced as housing projects throughout the city are torn down.

Without question, the Chicago Housing Authority is working to change the appearance, the quality and the culture of public housing. But the agency also is building a new set of challenges along with the mixed-income housing that is replacing the

former projects. There will be tougher requirements to get into fewer subsidized units, putting the most disadvantaged former public housing residents at risk of finding themselves in worse predicaments than before. And those who lose out will have to find someplace else to live, even if it's in the streets. Critics say the city is just pushing the old problems onto other communities and agencies.

In late March, some of the last survivors of former Chicago public housing projects congregated outside the Ida B. Wells

project's "extensions," their new home. According to one old-timer relaxing with his friends on a warm spring day, "All of the original people are gone."

Farther north on State Street, the Harold Ickes Homes are strangely quiet. Several structures sit boarded up, and the foyers of the buildings are empty. The only sign of movement comes from the blue flashing lights on the Chicago Police Department cameras scattered throughout the development.

A few blocks south, the last white

brick, 17-story project located on Federal Street in Chicago's historic Bronzeville neighborhood waits to be torn down. It's the last remnant of Stateway Gardens. The neighboring Robert Taylor Homes, marked as some of the worst in the nation for their concentration of poverty, are completely gone. In 2000, the U.S. Census Monitoring Board stated that, out of those Robert Taylor Homes residents who were screened, 84 percent earned less than \$10,000 annually.

The hollow project stands in an oasis of new condos, single family homes and town houses that sell for anywhere from \$200,000 to \$600,000 a unit. Commercial developers now control the land, and new construction is replacing the dilapidated Robert Taylor and Stateway Gardens buildings.

The new commercial-rate units, marketed as Park Boulevard and Legends South, "are selling like hotcakes," says Bryan Zises, spokesman for the Chicago Housing Authority. In fact, Park Boulevard is a stone's throw from the fairly new White Sox stadium and the rapidly growing Illinois Institute of Technology campus.

While the commercial-rate units offer new opportunities for those who can afford them, the loss of subsidized units creates uncertainty for the neighborhood low-income residents. According to a 2003 Ford Foundation report, the 4,321 Robert Taylor units were reduced to just 2,400. By the time the project is done, the city will lose 14,000 public housing units, according to the report, *CHA Relocation Counseling Assessment*, published by the Washington, D.C.-based Urban Institute, a nonpartisan research organization.

A third of the new units will sell at market rates. Another third will be built for middle-income families. And the final third will be set aside for subsidized residents. Yet the eligibility requirements will put even these units beyond the means of many former public housing residents.

Residents will need to work at least 30 hours a week or attend school to be eligible to move back. They also must be current on rent and utility payments and have an

established credit history.

But evidence shows most public housing residents could have a hard time staying employed. The Metropolitan Planning Council, in a 2005 report that used data from the Chicago Department of Human Services, concluded that 44 percent of public housing residents who were involved in job training, counseling or other programs to help them stay employed didn't finish high school. More than 60 percent read below the eighth-grade level. Less than a third of heads of households worked consistently for an entire year.

Most public housing residents would have to find jobs accessible to public transportation to meet the income

Those who have records of assault, drug, homicide, murder, domestic violence, burglary, theft, weapon, sexual assault or home invasion convictions within the previous three years will be denied. Households that have records of disturbances in prior housing won't qualify.

Family members with a history of drug abuse are subject to drug screenings and a rehab program approved by the housing authority. Once they move in, residents are subject to regular housekeeping checks.

Zises, the housing authority spokesman, says re-entry is a problem that goes beyond the agency's regulations. "There is not an easy answer to the complex question of how to deal with criminal background checks," he says.

He adds that the authority does consider special circumstances, but for the most part, applicants must wait three years after convictions to be eligible to move in.

The primary goal, he says, focuses on eliminating economic segregation.

"The bigger picture is that we know what happens when you isolate. You create islands of poverty. That was the problem with the original plan. It wasn't smart to isolate."

Zises stresses that the new plan works and that there have been few problems with residents meeting requirements,

developers selling units or public housing residents integrating into the new communities. He says one or two families have been unable to adjust and have been asked to leave the new structures. The agency has helped more than 3,000 residents get jobs, increasing the percentage of residents employed from 25 percent to 38 percent.

Nevertheless, many former residents won't make the cut under the new requirements.

In the early stages of the plan, housing projects that failed federal standards for remodeling were systematically shut down and put on demolition schedules. The tenants of those buildings had two options: either sign up for a housing choice voucher, formally known as Section 8, a federally funded housing assistance program, or sign a contract to move back into rebuilt developments. Relatives and

Photograph courtesy of the Chicago Housing Authority



An aerial view of the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago before redevelopment

requirement. Sue Popkin, a researcher for the Urban Institute, found that only one in eight public housing residents has a driver's license. One in five owns a car that runs.

In *De Facto Shelters: Homeless Living in Vacant Public Housing Units*, Popkin wrote that 73 percent of public housing residents reported criminal or legal problems that threatened their eligibility to move back in. Some are experiencing problems with landlords demanding more money for additional family members living in the households. Others have been harassed by local gangs in their new communities.

Furthermore, if residents want to remain lease-compliant, they must refuse shelter to their children and relatives who are released from prison. Along those lines, all members of households older than 18 must pass criminal background checks.



Three-flats on Division Street replaced Cabrini-Green projects.



The old White Sox Stadium, seen in the background, stands across the highway from the former Stateway Gardens before the housing projects were replaced with mixed-income communities.

friends living with leaseholders had no such rights. Some became homeless.

"While the CHA didn't have a legal reason to provide many of these people with housing, does that mean they shouldn't have a moral reason?" says Brady Harden Jr., president of Inner Voice, a Chicago organization that provides assistance to the homeless.

"How many of us have relatives that need to live in our households from time to time?"

But it's unclear who bears the responsibility for ensuring that so-called squatters have a place to live.

"It shouldn't be the homeless shelters," Harden says. "Somebody thought the public housing residents would disappear, but they reappeared in the shelters."

Harden says his organization previously had a good working relationship with the housing authority. For instance, he says, the authority would allow some of his clients to live in abandoned structures as a way to prevent vandalism until the buildings were ready to be rehabbed or demolished. Now, Harden says, he doesn't even call the agency when he meets a family that needs housing.

"The CHA should have a sign, 'Homeless people need not apply,'" Harden says.

The waiting list includes more than 40,000 people for the estimated 25,000 units, 20,000 of which will be set aside for returning public housing residents. Harden says the wait is a big deterrent.

"We used to keep statistics of how many displaced public housing residents were coming to homeless shelters. Then we stopped," he says.

However, Harden says he remembers finding shelter for about 25 families immediately after the housing authority first started tearing down buildings. Many of them were single mothers with two or more children.

Willie Fleming organizes events for the Coalition to Protect Public Housing, an advocacy group of residents and social service agencies. He also lives in Cabrini-Green, a community of housing projects made notorious by media coverage of its gang wars and random shootings. Cabrini-Green sits a hop, skip and jump from Chicago's downtown area and is surrounded by \$400,000-and-up town homes and new developments.

His organization says the housing authority's use of vouchers is ineffective and that residents with vouchers face discrimination trying to secure roofs over their heads. He says 85 percent of previous public housing residents have been forced to move into property-poor areas that have high rates of crime. He attributes this to the time restrictions on finding housing under the voucher program.

"You can't take those vouchers to the Gold Coast or to Lincoln Park because most landlords aren't going to accept them," he says.

Fleming and Harden agree that new requirements may be difficult for residents. However, Zises of the housing authority disputes those claims, saying there isn't proof.

A study administered by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago shows that 64 percent of 223 leaseholders said they felt better about their

opportunities, 29 percent said they felt the same and 7 percent said they felt worse. Eighty-one percent of 94 residents surveyed on the housing voucher plan said their life opportunities were better since they moved.

Zises says while housing residents are concentrated in certain areas, he doesn't attribute the clusters to discrimination. "Some residents need that social network, so they move near friends and family."

The requirements and the relocation process made the Coalition to Protect Public Housing take action. The organization filed a federal lawsuit against the housing authority to address relocation issues for Cabrini-Green residents.

"The enforcement of the rules for residents to move back into public housing is less than fair and intentionally biased," says Fleming.

He adds the group deals with complaints from residents who have experienced hardship when trying to relocate with housing vouchers. He says most find shelter in Englewood and on the far South and West sides of Chicago, locations that can be miles away from their old units.

"Some of these new areas are far worse than where the residents have left," he says. "I thought the idea was for residents to better themselves."

Not everyone thinks the new rules are unfair, though. "Since the very beginning of public housing, there have always been screening requirements," says Barbara Jackson, past resident of the Washington Park Homes on Chicago's South Side. "This is nothing new."



A North Town Village mid-rise north of Division Street on Halsted replaces part of the Cabrini-Green housing projects.



Three of 17 high rises that were part of the Cabrini-Green housing projects still stand. They're scheduled for demolition in 2008.

Jackson says she lived in Chicago public housing when people followed the rules and the housing authority did its homework by screening residents. The second generation of her family to live in housing, she watched as housing developments deteriorated. Unlike some of her friends, Jackson moved out before the agency's 10-year Plan for Transformation got under way in 1999.

Somewhere along the way, maintenance of the units dwindled, rules stopped being enforced, young people without guidance moved in and the screening process was watered down, she says. She points to lack of funding.

"I definitely don't think the new requirements are unfair," Jackson says. "Some residents are just used to living 'the old type of life' where they can do just about whatever they want."

Others, including Fleming, aren't as sure. "Why are the rules different for residents living in public housing or with housing vouchers than those who wish to move into mixed-income housing?" Fleming asks.

He adds that he feels the agency is more concerned with the profitability of development. "I wish anyone good luck in finding out the truth. They'll have to dig through piles of greed to get to it."

Zises says the agency spends more than \$22 million to ensure it meets the needs for all lease-compliant public housing residents, whether those needs include job training, literacy or drug rehab programs. The authority puts about \$180,000 into each new unit set aside for public housing residents, and the developers pick up any

additional costs.

The agency plans to operate 31 supportive service offices to connect residents to job training, adult education classes, employment assistance and counseling services. Substance abuse referrals also are available.

Harden of Inner Voice says the supportive programs are outstanding; however, he has mixed feelings about the city's transformation plan.

"Don't get me wrong, I love the new buildings," Harden says. "They are beautiful, but they don't help our clients."

Inner Voice operates nine homeless shelters throughout the city and is involved with 11 more. The organization operates on the near West Side of Chicago near a new mixed-income community called West Haven, which stands in the former spot of the infamous Henry Horner Homes, the subject of the book, *There Are No Children Here*. The neighborhood is steps away from the newest professional stadium built for the Chicago Bulls and the Blackhawks.

"We live in the shadows of Henry Horner, but our clients can't get in," Harden says.

The biggest challenge for public housing residents and homeless people wanting to move into the mixed-income communities is the income and job requirements, according to Harden.

He says some of the requirements create another formula for disaster. "We don't want the crime element in public housing. We want safe housing. But what if Daddy wants to come home after being incarcerated and get his life together?"

What are we going to say, 'Daddy is not worthy to live with you?'"

Harden says chasing fathers out of the house isn't the smartest thing to do. "We saw this with welfare reform. It causes other problems down the road when people are trying to raise their children without fathers in the household."

The more than 40,000 families on the public housing waiting list remains an issue. The federal government has cut funding for public housing, Zises says.

"[The] waiting list and the national problem is a very serious issue; however, we can only do as much as we can with the money that is given," he says. "We can't do more. We can't solve the world's problems in a vacuum."

Finding out how many residents will be able to meet Chicago's requirements will have to wait. Unforeseen construction costs have slowed the agency's transformation plan, delaying the plan's timeline for completion until 2015.

In the meantime, the biggest challenge may not be for the city as much as for the former residents who wait for public housing. □

Editor's note: Deane Williams-Harris, Illinois Issues' graduate Public Affairs Reporting intern, lived in Chicago's Washington Park Homes and Stateway Gardens public housing projects before her family moved to the North Side. Her parents were among the first families to move into the Robert Taylor Homes and Stateway Gardens. As an undergraduate student at Southern Illinois University Carbonale, she researched media coverage of public housing residents before the demolition plans were drafted.

Shaky business

The private sector worries Illinois won't remain a good place to invest if the state doesn't maintain its fiscal, social and physical infrastructure

by Bethany Carson

State Sen. Michael Bond represents a district that has the foundation of a booming new industry, and he's trying to attract more leading-edge companies that are producing the next wave of medicines, energy supplies and aircraft. But Bond's strategy for attracting entrepreneurs to that northeastern region faces an uncertain future as Illinois officials wrestle this legislative session with two pressing state issues: potential tax reform and chronic debt.

Bond, a Grayslake Democrat, wants to develop more regions like his, which is home to two Fortune 500 companies, Abbott Laboratories in North Chicago and Baxter International in Deerfield, both medical and pharmaceutical giants.

"You have a synergy," he says. "We already have the beginnings of a workforce. Abbott alone employs 600 [medical doctors] in the Abbott Park North Chicago facility. It's the world headquarters. That's compelling for someone who's looking to open up a research lab."

He proposed legislation this spring to extend corporate income tax credits and create "advanced science zones" that would draw additional clusters of high-skilled workers throughout the state. But the idea is on hold while lawmakers focus on Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposal to overhaul business taxes. Bond has had to scale back his measure, calling instead for



Photograph courtesy of Archer Daniels Midland Co.

Archer Daniels Midland Co., one of the largest agricultural processors in the world, operates its international headquarters in Decatur in central Illinois.

a panel to develop a 10- to 15-year plan for attracting advanced technology industries to Illinois.

What makes his dilemma so interesting is that it highlights a potential shift in the long-running philosophical debate over economic development. In recent decades, tax breaks have been part and parcel of state and local government strategies for luring businesses to Illinois and keeping them here, along with the jobs they offer. But it's becoming increasingly clear that one person's tax break can be another person's tax loophole. And that brings us to the governor, who argues Illinois business is no longer paying its fair share of state taxes.

Under the governor's proposal, the state corporate income tax would be phased out, which would negate Bond's proposed tax incentives. The corporate income tax would be replaced with a tax on all revenues generated by companies with

more than \$2 million in sales — an idea the state's business community considers onerous.

On one point, everyone agrees: It's big. The governor says his so-called gross receipts tax would net \$7.6 billion annually, constituting the "largest single-year state tax increase this decade," according to the Tax Foundation, a nonpartisan research group based in Washington, D.C.

Business groups argue that if the tax wouldn't be

enough to make Illinois look like a bad investment bet, the state's deep budget deficit, high debt load and daunting long-term obligations, combined with the governor's expensive new education and health care spending proposals, surely will.

Today, they argue, a state's fiscal, social and physical infrastructure weigh as heavily in private sector investment decisions as the so-called economic incentives of yesterday.

In fact, a December report by the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, a high-powered organization of corporate leaders, warned the state faces "financial implosion" if it continues to neglect the fundamentals, and asserted, to general amazement, that it likely will need to raise taxes.

Now, Civic Committee President R. Eden Martin argues the governor's proposed budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1 doesn't face financial realities.

During a March hearing of the House Revenue Committee, Martin said Illinois already is \$20 billion in debt. That debt would increase to \$36 billion if the General Assembly approves Blagojevich's new spending and borrowing plans.

By the Civic Committee's count, the state also faces \$46 billion in unfunded liability for its public employee pension systems, as well as an estimated \$48 billion in health care benefits due state retirees and another \$1.7 billion in backlogged payments due medical providers who care for low-income Illinoisans.

"We ought to cover today's costs today," Martin said. "We either ought to reduce expenses or raise revenues or both to cover today's costs and obligations. The one thing we shouldn't do, our committee said, was to keep pushing the snowball of growing obligations down the hill onto future generations and taxpayers."

The Civic Committee's assessment, along with similar reports by other organizations, led to a rare accord among business and labor groups this spring as they joined in warning lawmakers that long-term debt and uncapped spending could cripple the state's ability to adequately fund schools, roads and the other basic services needed to cultivate and maintain a healthy economy.

That's not to say Illinois lacks an attractive business portfolio. Such major companies as State Farm Insurance Co., the Bloomington-based Fortune 500 company, ranks No. 1 in Illinois and No. 22 in the nation for revenues, according to the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The state's second-wealthiest corporation is Chicago-based Boeing, a manufacturer of commercial jetliners and military aircraft.

More than 30 Fortune 500 companies operate in this state. They all benefit from Illinois' diverse workforce and diverse economy that is unlikely to collapse if one industry fails.

Manufacturing, real estate and finance contribute most to the state's gross domestic product, with such international operations as Archer Daniels Midland Co. in Decatur, Motorola in Schaumburg, Caterpillar in Peoria and Chicago's Mercantile Exchange and the Board of Trade.

But the state has had its share of disappointments. In 2004, Galesburg lost its Maytag refrigerator plant, which employed about 1,600 people. When Whirlpool Corp.



Gov. Rod Blagojevich spoke to more than 500 people at the Marion Civic Center in southern Illinois on the third day of his "Investing in Families" bus tour. He was joined on stage by his wife Patti and Marion Mayor Bob Butler, left, and Ed Smith, Midwest regional manager of Laborers' International Union of North America, far right.

How do regulations affect investment decisions?

One example of a potential investment hinging on state policy pertains to AT&T, which is supporting legislation this spring to further deregulate Illinois' telecommunications sector. The telephone and cable giant wants to expand its video network around the state, which would allow video providers to market their services statewide. Currently, all companies must approach municipalities one by one to create local video franchises.

Paul La Schiazza, president of AT&T Illinois, says, "There's at least 10 other states that have passed bills that have made it very favorable for alternative video providers to invest, literally, hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure."

Those investments would enhance the telecommunications network and make broadband more available, he says. "From that perspective, Illinois is lagging behind other states."

Without approval of the statewide video franchising legislation, La Schiazza says AT&T's \$4.6 billion investment and expected job growth would go elsewhere.

"That's not a threat, but this company has to deploy the capital to stay competitive."

Opponents include municipalities and other video providers who say a statewide video franchise would strip local control, allow AT&T to "cherry pick" affluent customers and erode protections for all customers.

The legislation was pending in a House committee as of mid-April.

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purchased Maytag last spring, Herrin in southern Illinois lost a near-1,000-employee Maytag washer plant, and Schaumburg lost its Maytag administrative building.

Last summer, Fithian in east central Illinois lost a bid for Honda's \$550 million new auto plant, which is expected to employ 2,000 people in Indiana in 2008. The decision to locate in Indiana rather than east central Illinois was a matter of location, according to Andrew Ross, spokesman for the state's economic development agency. Honda, which has major auto manufacturing plants in Ohio, made a public announcement last summer that Indiana offers the transportation and infrastructure necessary to support industry, though it didn't say Illinois is lacking in those areas.

But the state still has some possible projects in the pipeline. Illinois could win a bid for FutureGen, a \$1 billion project that promises to build the world's first zero-emissions coal-fired power plant, meaning a cleaner source of energy. Some of the largest coal producers are partnering with the U.S. Department of Energy to design the plant and research corridor that could end up in central Illinois' Tuscola or Mattoon, the finalists competing against two Texas cities.

But beyond offering specific tax credits and legal protections for the project, Illinois lawmakers might want to consider ways the state could generate the skilled workers, the basic infrastructure and the general tax climate to support such investments.

The good news is that Illinois has the basis of a highly skilled workforce, particularly with the rise of such advanced industries as biotechnology, telecommunications and "clean coal" power supplies.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity reports that, with research centers and medical schools at Northwestern University in Evanston and Chicago, the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois ranks No. 5 for the number of science and engineering doctorates. That rating was issued by the National Science Foundation, which was created by Congress.

More Illinoisans are earning college degrees now than in the past decade, according to a series of workforce-related reports published last year by the Chicago-



The Illinois Department of Transportation completed a congestion relief project on I-74 in 2005.

based Center for Tax and Budget Accountability and Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. In 2005, nearly 33 percent of the labor force had a bachelor's degree or higher. That's nearly 8 percentage points higher than the 1990 rate of about 25 percent.

"That's going to become crucial going forward, especially because two-thirds of all the high-growth, high-wage occupations in the future are going to require a bachelor's degree," says John Lewis, a senior researcher with the Regional Development Institute at Northern.

Funded by the Joyce Foundation, the series of *State of Working Illinois* reports concludes that, while the number of manufacturing jobs in Illinois dropped by more than 225,800 between 1990 and 2005, the service sector added 640,600 new jobs, with more than 64,000 in 2005 alone.

Most service sector jobs pay less and offer fewer health benefits than other industries, but Illinois added 81,700 high-paying service jobs in three years, a growth rate exceeding the national rate and the growth in Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin.

The outlook up to 2012 looks even better, according to the Illinois Department of Employment Security. The agency projects that more than a third of the new jobs, or more than 213,300 of them, will pay \$50,000 to more than \$72,500. The

projections signal that Illinois' new jobs won't be the low-wage, dead-end type, but the Illinois workforce report warns that the state would have to ensure that training would be available to fill those high-wage positions.

In the Blagojevich Administration's first four years, the state dedicated \$63 million to workforce research and created a program to identify well-paying, critical jobs with good benefits that have a shortage of workers, says Ross.

In fact, Illinois stands as one of the leaders in linking economic development with workforce development and education, according to Gerri Fiala, director of workforce research for the National Center on Education and the Economy, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C.

She says the "targeted investments" identify an industry that's key to a specific region and then determine the root reasons those industries suffer from a shortage of workers. The tailored programs not only benefit the regions that receive funding, but also connect each region with the statewide economy.

Last January, for instance, the program provided \$240,000 for job training in southern Illinois' integral industries of manufacturing, transportation and logistics.

Statewide, four of the five fastest-growing industries are in the service sector



The Murray Baker Bridge in Peoria reopened in 2005 after 180 feet were removed to lengthen the ramps and raise the grade of I-74.

and include wholesale trade, finance and insurance, scientific and technical services and business management, according to the *State of Working Illinois 2006* report.

But there's no guarantee Illinois' economy will be able to create enough high-wage jobs to keep up with the supply of qualified applicants.

A surplus of highly educated workers who don't have jobs could mean more demand for social services, public health and mass transit without increasing the ability of the state's economy to pay for them, the study says. If the highly educated workers left, their absence would further undermine the state's economy.

On the other hand, the workers who lack basic skills — reading comprehension, active listening and speaking abilities — wouldn't be fit for the high-skilled positions that become available.

That's why a good education system is fundamental to any economic plan.

This year, Blagojevich proposes putting \$10 billion into education over the next four years, starting with the largest increase — \$1.5 billion — in the upcoming fiscal year. Higher education's public universities would get \$25 million, a 1.9 percent increase over last year's funding. About \$7.6 million would target teacher preparation and nursing.

But some national researchers with the National Center on Education and the

Economy say the way the money is spent is the key to change. The center supports an overhaul of the nation's expensive educational system and a new focus on creating more highly skilled workers.

"While I think that education is under-resourced in general, the way dollars get spent could be better allocated," says James Pellegrino, a contributor to the project and a psychology and education professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "I don't think Illinois has invested very well in an effective system of assessments."

He wrote a November 2006 report commissioned by the center and says the federal No Child Left Behind Act has led states away from effective ways to measure student achievement. Multiple choice tests, for instance, have replaced more open-ended, constructive response tests that he says would provide more information about how well students absorb the lessons.

He says without an effective way of measuring students' skills, the business community lacks a steady grasp on what the job pool has to offer.

Location and geography, meanwhile, give Illinois businesses a natural competitive advantage over other states, but transportation advocates doubt whether Illinois can maintain its

exceptional ability to move people and goods to all corners of the country and around the globe. This is a particular concern to Illinois' agribusiness and manufacturing companies.

"[The] entire history of this state's economy has been centered around its location and the fact of the ability to get goods and products in here," says James Nelson, spokesman for the Illinois Manufacturers' Association.

The region's two major ports in Chicago and St. Louis are supported by more than 1,000 miles of waterways, a central railroad network and the national hub of O'Hare International Airport. The ability to distribute goods has attracted about 40 percent of the nation's richest 500 companies to operate regional distribution centers in Illinois, according to the most recent data compiled by the state's economic development agency.

But transportation advocates argue that edge has been jeopardized. Going into this legislative session, there's a four-year stalemate over a major capital program for new road construction, and road funds have been diverted by several governors.

The Transportation for Illinois Coalition, an advocate for business and labor groups, warns that another year of declining transportation investment would impair businesses and jobs, "in other words, the tax base" that supports other state programs. The group says congestion on northeast Illinois roadways would continue to slow the flow of goods and services, as well as hinder the movement of rail freight. And railroad congestion could worsen as the amount of rail freight and the number of Amtrak passengers continue to rise as expected.

Congestion around Chicago causes a statewide problem, the group says, and the lack of investment in northern Illinois prevents downstate communities from linking to national and international markets. The group wants Illinois to invest \$5 billion in the next fiscal year and another \$5 billion over five more years to halt some of those trends.

The governor's budget office responded in an e-mail saying business groups use inflamed rhetoric without suggesting a way to pay for their \$25 billion plan.

"Governor Blagojevich has proposed a balanced budget that prioritizes spending to help our kids learn and increase access

to health care, and a capital bill is on the table for discussion only after these important needs have been met," wrote Justin DeJong, spokesman for the Office of Management and Budget.

The governor does propose \$1.3 billion for ongoing maintenance of existing roads and another \$3 billion bonding program, but the bonds are contingent on Blagojevich's tax overhaul plan winning legislative approval. Mass transit would get \$425 million over three years through a capital program to secure \$1.7 billion in federal matching funds.

The Illinois Department of Transportation also is conducting major construction projects to ease congestion on two Cook County expressways. And Mike Claffey, department spokesman, says the state agency is working with Chicago and federal officials to improve rail traffic. So far, the project has received \$100 million from the feds, but the total cost could reach \$1.5 billion, Claffey says.

Without a capital program from the legislature, however, he says the agency has to "live within our means."

Business groups urge the state to live within its means, as well. And they've upped the ante by suggesting the need for general state tax increases.

"It's tough to get a business organization to say that, but I think it's part of facing facts," Martin, president of the Civic Committee, said during the House Revenue Committee meeting in March.

The Civic Committee, a group of about 80 chief executives of Chicago-area businesses and nonprofits, recommends raising money by increasing income taxes and expanding sales taxes while cutting costs and reforming the education funding system.

So far, legislative leaders aren't seeing eye-to-eye on ways to reform the state's tax policy. And the Civic Committee isn't encouraged by the governor's proposed spending plans.

"One of two things will be true, or maybe both will be

true, and that is, one, that the taxes you had to pay in the state will go way up in the future to pay for the sins of the past," Martin says, "and the other is that you may see a deterioration in state services, including support for schools."

Blagojevich's team is more optimistic, naming his proposal the "Tax Fairness Plan." He says it will net \$7.6 billion a year, using some of those dollars for a near-universal health care program. In addition to paying the new gross receipts tax, businesses would be subject to a 3 percent payroll tax if they don't offer comprehensive health benefits to employees. That tax would generate about \$1 billion a year.

"This will ease the burden on the middle class and force big corporations to start paying their fair share," Blagojevich said to the General Assembly during his annual budget address in March.

He has since toured the state lobbying for his plan, picking up support from education unions, health care organizations, small businesses and manufacturers, as well as the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Illinois State Black Chamber of Commerce. But smaller businesses likely would be exempt from the gross receipts tax.

The Illinois Manufacturers' Association finds the proposal "terribly disconcerting" and insulting.

What is the gross receipts tax?

The governor's plan would tax business transactions rather than corporate income. Service industries would pay a tax on cash receipts at each step in the supply chain in Illinois regardless of whether the company makes a profit that year. Agriculture, manufacturing, mining, construction, wholesale and retail activities would be subject to lower rates than other businesses. Exports, insurance, retail food, pharmaceuticals and gaming would be exempt. So would Medicaid payments and not-for-profits.

Compared to seven other states that have a similar type of tax — New Jersey's expired last July — Illinois' would be unique. And being different from surrounding states could carry economic consequences if businesses find it's cheaper to move supply chains across state borders, according to J. Thomas Johnson, president of the Taxpayers' Federation of Illinois.

Ohio's receipts tax, for instance, started in 2005 but is being phased in over five years at a flat rate of 0.26 percent, compared to Blagojevich's most recently proposed 1.9 percent for businesses that have sales exceeding \$2 million and 0.85 percent for agriculture, manufacturing, mining, construction, wholesale and retail companies.

"This kind of idea that we have a class warfare going on, about business not paying its fair share, is really a kind of rhetoric this governor ought to tone down," says Nelson, the association's spokesman.

Manufacturers already pay a slightly higher cost of doing business in Illinois than they do in border states, which Nelson attributes to higher wages, higher rates for workers' compensation insurance and unemployment insurance and a 5 percent utility tax beyond the local utility tax.

State taxes, while rated as an issue by association members, isn't a top factor in deciding to locate or expand in Illinois, Nelson says, but they find the gross receipts tax particularly burdensome.

"The gross receipts tax is probably the most onerous and negative tax that could be proposed for most businesses and especially for manufacturers because it has a pyramiding and compounding impact," Nelson says. "If that were to pass, then I might move it to the top of the list."

The proposed tax overhaul has led the House Revenue Committee to hold a series of multiple-hour hearings to assess the effect on Illinois' economy. Committee chairman Rep. John Bradley, a Marion Democrat, says he's found consensus in some unexpected places. Some business, labor and tax experts support parts of the governor's budget plan, but all disagree with the administration's comments that

Illinois doesn't have a structural deficit.

While statistics show Illinois is charging through another year of economic growth since the 2001 national recession, the state's budgetary condition could maim confidence in its ability to cultivate a healthy business climate.

Looming debt and proposed borrowing form a large cloud on the horizon, says Martin of the Civic Committee. "There are a lot of people who are very worried this spring. We could put a big stain on Illinois' reputation that would be hard to wash away." □

Bethany Carson

Sun Tzu to you

Illinois politicians are bracing for a showdown this spring on taxes and school spending. Should we read *The Art of War*?

by Aaron Chambers

Senate President Emil Jones Jr. had his hands on either side of a tomahawk. It was early January, the day he was installed as Senate leader for another two years, using his inaugural speech to declare his chief priority for the spring legislative session: fundamental improvement of state funding for public schools. As he sat behind his desk in his Capitol office, taking questions from reporters, the tomahawk lay within reach.

"Who are the leaders in the world? What countries are the leaders?" Jones asked rhetorically. "Why are they leaders? Those who have the biggest weapons are the leaders."

Jones began the session with a fighting tool of his own, albeit one of a political nature: a supermajority of votes. There are 37 Democrats in the Senate, including Jones. If he can keep 36 of those votes together, he can overcome a gubernatorial veto in his chamber, not to mention steam-roller opposition from Republicans.

Jones rose and pointed to a wall, where a knife with a spiked knuckle guard hung in a framed box over a passage from *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. "Do not depend on the enemy not coming," it says. "Depend rather on being ready for him." Huddled with reporters beside the blade, Jones pressed his theme of military superiority.

Asked whether he viewed 37 votes as his

own weapon, Jones demurred. "Thirty-seven is out there for the children," he said.

The campaign this session for more state spending on schools is marked by such passionate if lofty rhetoric. For his part, Gov. Rod Blagojevich says his plan to institute a new tax on business, in part to bolster state spending on schools, puts him firmly on the side of God. Striking a warlike stance of his own, the governor likens the coming battle over his plan in the legislature to Armageddon.

Beyond the overheated imagery, though, and despite a long history of failed efforts, several factors bode well for improving both the adequacy and the equity of state school finance. Perhaps chief among them is the newfound power of Jones, who has long pushed the state to step up school spending.

Meanwhile, a bipartisan collection of lawmakers appears enthusiastic about



A panel testifies on education funding during a House committee meeting. Spouses of HB 750, in the foreground right to left, are Rep. David Miller, a Lynwood Democrat, and Sen. James Meeks, a Chicago Democrat.

change and open-minded toward such unpopular remedies as a tax increase. This group, representing Democrats and Republicans from the Senate and the House, calls itself the Education Caucus. Its members say they are dedicated to improving schools this spring through increasing state funding and requiring schools to account for the additional dollars.

Further, education reform leaders in the legislature may benefit from the efforts of a

coalition of education groups, including the Illinois Education Association, the Illinois Federation of Teachers and A+ Illinois, which has worked over the past two years to build grass-roots pressure for more state spending on schools.

The state's ongoing fiscal troubles also could motivate politicians to vote for such an increase. House Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat, began this session by implying a tax increase may be necessary to correct the balance sheet. He said he's prepared to take unpopular action, and that he won't be among "the faint of heart."

Madigan called a report by the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, which pegged the state's unfunded debt at \$106 billion (about \$8,800 for each resident), "a wake-up call." In fact, lawmakers who are reluctant to take the political risk of raising taxes to bolster

Photograph by Bethany Carson

the state's bottom line might be persuaded by the prospect of getting credit for helping education. They could send more state dollars to schools while helping the government catch up with its pension and health care bills.

Clare Fauke, spokeswoman for the A+ Illinois Coalition, says the issues are intertwined. She says the state must reconcile its ongoing fiscal problems to avoid perennially short-changing schools. "It's a lot of money, but this is money that the state is obligated to pay," she says. "We can't have this huge structural deficit continue on because it's only going to pull more money away from education and the human services end. As long as we're talking about increasing revenue, let's get the state's fiscal health in order and move forward."

Still, it's no easy task to usher an overhaul of school funding through the General Assembly. The two major plans pending before lawmakers involve massive tax increases, and both face considerable opposition.

Blagojevich says the state can collect another \$7.6 billion annually by replacing the corporate income tax with a gross receipts tax, a tax on revenue businesses take in each time they conduct transactions. He says the state, under his plan, would spend another \$3 billion each year on public schools. During the next school year, as the plan is phased in, state spending on education would increase by \$1.5 billion. The governor's plan would increase general state aid by more than \$800 million, while hiking spending on special education, transportation and other "mandated categoricals" by \$359 million. It would put another \$69 million behind preschool and another \$8 million behind bilingual education.

Over the four years of his second term, Blagojevich says, his plan would mean more than \$10 billion in fresh revenue for schools. Separately, Blagojevich wants to raise another \$1 billion annually by taxing the payrolls of companies that are not providing health insurance for their employees. These dollars would help support an extension of state-subsidized health care to every uninsured adult in Illinois, the governor's centerpiece initiative this session.

The other school funding plan, known as House Bill 750, represents a more tradi-

tional approach to generating additional state dollars for schools: across-the-board state tax increases. It would raise individual and corporate income tax rates, while extending the sales tax to services. Proponents say it would raise an additional \$9 billion annually, and \$2.1 billion of that would be earmarked for schools in the form of general state aid. Another \$608 million would support special education staff, while \$300 million would be slated for schools in communities that have high poverty and \$180 million would go to early childhood education.

That measure would dedicate \$3.4 billion for the state's five public employee pension systems. Blagojevich has his own plan to help the retirement systems, whose unfunded liability tops \$40 billion. The governor wants the state to issue \$16 billion in bonds and sell or lease the lottery for \$10 billion, then use the \$26 billion to pay down much of that debt.

Both plans offer school construction components. Blagojevich wants to sell \$1.5 billion in bonds to invigorate school construction. HB 750 would set aside \$50 million annually to cover the cost of a school construction plan, proponents say, though it's not clear how large such a plan might be.

Both plans also aim to ease pressures on local property taxpayers, long considered the Holy Grail of school reform crusaders. Despite a state constitutional provision giving the state "primary responsibility for financing the system of public education," the local property tax covers some 58 percent of school spending in Illinois.

Blagojevich's original plan, announced in early March, included no property tax relief component. He later revised it to promise \$1 billion in property tax relief. HB 750 would slate \$3.6 billion in tax relief, including \$2.7 billion for property tax relief, proponents say.

In mid-April, as lawmakers returned from a two-week spring break, proponents of the competing plans braced for a showdown. Blagojevich's plan, backed by Jones, appeared to have gained little traction among lawmakers. HB 750, on the other hand, cleared a House committee with bipartisan support.

Jones previously supported the tax-hike principles of HB 750, and his inaugural call for more state spending on schools was

widely perceived as support for the measure. But after Blagojevich proposed the gross receipts tax, Jones swiftly endorsed that alternative plan.

Blagojevich pledged during last year's campaign he would not raise income or sales tax rates, and this spring he reiterated that stance by saying he would "never" approve such tax hikes. He argues businesses would not pass the cost of the gross receipts tax along to consumers and that individuals won't be hurt by the tax.

"If we can make the big corporations, the ones that make \$263 billion in sales, the ones with powerful lobbyists, armies of accountants, fancy lawyers, big corporate jets, if we can make them pay their fair share, we can fundamentally improve our schools and give every citizen in Illinois access to affordable, comprehensive health care," Blagojevich said in early April as he kicked off a statewide tour promoting his plan. He called it a way to "fundamentally change how we fund our schools, properly fund our schools, and do something now that they've only been talking about for the last 30 years — improve the quality of education by having fair funding for our schools."

At the end of March, Jones stepped further away from HB 750 and its Senate equivalent, Senate Bill 750. "I want to clarify unequivocally that I will not call any bill for a vote that raises the income tax or sales tax on people," Jones said in a statement. "The GRT will provide statewide property tax relief and put \$10 billion more dollars in our education system in Illinois. The GRT is the fair way to fund education and health care and to make sure big business is paying its fair share."

Less than a week later, a House committee responded by voting 12-3 in favor of HB 750. Two Republicans — Rep. Roger Eddy of Hutsonville and Rep. Jerry Mitchell of Sterling — joined Democrats in supporting the measure. Six committee members voted present.

Madigan hadn't publicly endorsed the bill, just as he hadn't formally opposed the governor's plan, but the committee's action indicated his tacit support. Madigan controls the House agenda, and the measure wouldn't have moved to the floor if he had objected to it.

Sen. James Meeks, a Chicago Democrat, and Rep. David Miller, a Lynwood Democrat, are sponsoring SB 750 and

HB 750, respectively. They say they aren't discouraged by the stiff rhetoric from Blagojevich and Jones. Meeks believes Jones can't win Senate passage of the governor's plan and that senators ultimately must vote on the alternative.

"There will be no other plan at the end of the day that we'll have to vote on in the Senate," Meeks says.

Under the Blagojevich plan, businesses such as law firms, accounting firms, real estate agencies, dry cleaners and lawn care companies that sell services would pay a 1.95 percent tax on their revenues, while businesses selling goods would pay a 0.85 percent tax on theirs. The rates would apply only to businesses that take in more than \$2 million in annual revenues. The corporate income tax would be phased out over four years, and it's not clear how the state would tax businesses with \$2 million or less in annual revenue after that.

HB 750 would raise the individual income tax rate from 3 percent to 5 percent and the corporate income tax rate from 4.8 percent to 8 percent. It also would expand the sales tax, at a base rate of 6.25 percent, to 21 services, from laundry and car washing to landscaping and warehousing. Under current law, the sales tax applies to the sale of goods but not to services. Past efforts to extend the sales tax to services have failed.

Both plans would hike the foundation per pupil spending level — the minimum amount that by law must be spent on each student — in the next school year. Local, state and federal dollars all count toward the foundation level. Property-poor school districts, those with less ability to raise local revenues, rely more heavily on the state to help them reach the minimum spending, so the foundation level is of greater significance to them.

This school year, the foundation level is \$5,334. Blagojevich's plan would raise that floor to \$6,058 next year. HB 750 would raise it to \$5,669 in the short term, but the measure says the level should be higher than \$6,674 in four years.

The four-year goal of \$6,674 is a benchmark set by the state's Education Funding Advisory Board, adjusted for inflation, according to the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, which helped craft the legislation. The advisory board is required under state law to report a recommended foundation level every two years, providing guidance to lawmakers.

The advisory board was supposed to issue an updated recommendation by January 1 but didn't do so. It has not even had a meeting. Steve Demitro, a Chicago attorney who is the Education Funding Advisory Board's chairman, says the governor must convene a meeting. "Everybody is ready, willing and able to meet," he says. "The issue is that it is the responsibility of the governor's office to hold a meeting. How else would you do it? There's nothing I would love more than to have a meeting."

Robyn Ziegler, spokeswoman for Attorney General Lisa Madigan, disagrees. "Nothing in the statutory language indicates that the board is to meet at the call of the governor, who is not a member of the body in any capacity," she says. "Rather, it appears that, like other continuous bodies, the board should organize itself and operate at the call of the chair or in accordance with such other procedures as it may have appropriately adopted."

Blagojevich officials did not respond to requests for comment regarding the board.

Two years ago, Blagojevich held up the board's recommendation by refusing to appoint members to the board. He ultimately made the appointments when threatened with a lawsuit by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. When it released its report in April 2005, the advisory board recommended a foundation level of \$6,405 — more than \$1,000 higher, per pupil, than the current statutory level.

Rather than wait for the advisory board, A+ Illinois is making its own updated recommendation on the foundation level. Adjusting for inflation, the group says lawmakers should strive to put the level at \$6,675 per pupil.

Blagojevich says his fight with Illinois businesses — he calls them "fat cats" — is monumental but that his tax-and-spend plan is what's "fundamentally right and fair." He says businesses have powerful lobbyists and lawyers, and that they stacked the deck in Springfield against "the working people."

"It's our job and our responsibility to be there for you, just as it's the responsibility of these big CEOs to be there and look after their shareholders. That's what they're doing when they try to maximize profits at all costs," Blagojevich told a crowd in Alton during his statewide tour last month.

Lawmakers are scheduled to conclude their session on May 31, but their work may drag on well into the summer.

"When they're all about making more money for themselves and for their shareholders, they're doing what their job is. But we weren't hired to do that. We were hired to look after you — the taxpayers, the working people, the great middle class that does most of the work but gets little or nothing in return."

Business leaders note that a company taking in a penny more than \$2 million in annual revenue — the threshold for taxation under the governor's plan — is hardly a huge corporation. They say the governor is poised to drive businesses — small and large — from Illinois.

"Businesses will make efforts to restructure their financial dealings to avoid the taxation," says Doug Whitley, president of the Illinois Chamber. "If that means that business that used to be conducted in Chicago now gets conducted in Atlanta or New York or Austin, so be it."

Lawmakers are scheduled to conclude their session on May 31, but their work may drag on well into the summer. Education funding, like such other highly charged matters as a proposed rollback of electric utility rates, may become just another bargaining chip in closed-door budget negotiations between Blagojevich and legislative leaders.

Jones and others in Springfield have worked for an overhaul of education funding since the 1970s, and they hope this session doesn't end with them pinning their hopes on the next one. As they formulate and execute strategy, they may be calling on Sun Tzu.

"There is no perfect plan, but the most imperfect plan would be to walk away and do nothing at the end of this," says Sean Noble, director of government relations for Voices for Illinois Children.

"That is the worst possible scenario, and one we can't allow to take place." □

Aaron Chambers covers the Statehouse for the Rockford Register Star.

DOLLAROCRACY

Pay-to-play culture still has a chokehold on Illinois politics

by Cynthia Canary and Ed Wojcicki

Columnist Bill McClellan of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* suggested that the University of Illinois change its sports teams' name to the Fighting Corrupt Politicians "because of the state's colorful history in that regard."

Funny, but not quite fair. Most Illinois officials strive to be honest and careful with taxpayers' money. On the other hand, the state's political culture and wide-open campaign finance system have led to the convictions of at least 75 people, including former Gov. George Ryan and his former chief of staff Scott Fawell, who oversaw an office that traded commercial driver's licenses for bribes when Ryan was secretary of state.

In Illinois' pay-to-play culture, businesses and the public too often assume that the only way to obtain a state contract is by greasing palms. That has devastating consequences because it discourages many good vendors who can offer superior services at a fair price from bidding. And it makes the public question the legitimacy of all state contractors.

Last fall, Patrick Fitzgerald, the U.S. attorney for the Northern District who won the Ryan conviction, described Illinois' system as an illegal "pay-to-play scheme on steroids" when he indicted Antoin "Tony" Rezko, a major fundraiser for Gov. Rod Blagojevich, Ryan's successor. That 24-count indictment accuses Rezko of pursuing nearly \$6 million in kickbacks from people wanting to do business with the state and attempting to wrestle \$1.5 million from a

Hollywood producer to be used as campaign contributions to Blagojevich.

In October, Stuart Levine, a former appointee to the Teachers' Retirement System Board and the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board, pleaded guilty to scheming in 2003 and 2004 to extract hefty payments for individuals and political campaigns from companies seeking to handle lucrative state investments. His plea agreement rehashed many of the details in the indictment of Rezko, who Levine said was a partner in his schemes. Rezko's case is winding through the courts while prosecutor Fitzgerald continues an aggressive investigation of state government.

Despite all the scandals, Illinois has taken only modest action in the past 10 years to address the central role of money in state politics. In 1996, we gave a presentation in Quincy about the uses and abuses of campaign funds in Illinois as part of the Illinois Campaign Finance Project, sponsored by *Illinois Issues*. We provided details about how Quincy-area and other Illinois elected officials raised and spent political money. The next day, the local newspaper reported on our big-picture denunciation of Illinois' wide-open campaign finance system, but ignored the information on how much local businesses had given to local legislators. Though nothing was illegal or improper about those contributions, it must have seemed embarrassing to the small-city paper to link local businesses and local officials with something as intimate as money.

Today, that has changed. The media

scrutinize political money more aggressively. Stories about scandals keep pay-to-play restrictions and contribution limits on the radar screen in Springfield. Reform, which usually comes in increments, often occurs more quickly in response to scandals.

The question is whether the legislature is finally ready to address such issues as restrictions on the pay-to-play culture that accepts there is a trade-off between giving campaign contributions and getting state contracts. Regulating that practice, combined with placing limits on contributions, would fundamentally alter Illinois' way of doing business.

This spring, three reform measures were approved by legislative committees much earlier than ordinarily happens. House Bill 1, for instance, would curtail pay-to-play practices. It would prohibit anyone who has state contracts with an annual value of more than \$25,000 from making political contributions to the constitutional officer who awards the contracts. It also requires bidders on state contracts to report any political contributions to the constitutional officer responsible for awarding the contract. Rep. John Fritchey, a Democrat from Chicago, is sponsoring the measure, which has more than 30 co-sponsors.

Another measure would give the secretary of state's inspector general new authority to investigate violations of the Lobbyist Registration Act. Adding an enforcement provision would demonstrate the state's commitment to strictly regulate lobbyist activities and would make clear to the few unethical lobbyists that their

transgressions will be treated seriously.

A third measure would create a voluntary program of public financing of judicial campaigns for the Illinois Supreme Court and appellate courts. This would alter the new reality of judicial campaigns where the candidate is often viewed as a wholly owned subsidiary of special interests. It would provide judicial candidates the resources to speak about their credentials, temperament and experience without having to put themselves in a position where they appear to commit to interests who may have cases coming before the court. Most important, judicial public financing will provide the public with the reassurance that Illinois' courts are not for sale.

Among those leading reform efforts is Comptroller Dan Hynes. In February 2005, Hynes was the first Illinois constitutional officer to issue an executive order saying he would not accept campaign contributions from people doing more than \$10,000 in business with his office. New state Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias became the second when he issued his own executive order prohibiting campaign contributions from banks and contracts for his contributors.

Hynes traveled the state rather quietly two years ago with a compelling message for one newspaper editorial board after another: Too many people believe they can't get business with the state of Illinois unless they make hefty campaign contributions. He said this pay-to-play custom is a reality, and it should be stopped. He has emerged as the most persistent, highest-ranking Illinois advocate of ending this culture in Illinois government.

Although reforms have been slow in coming, the current flurry of activity is part of an effort that stretches over a decade. First came the State Gift Ban Act of 1998, then the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act of 2003. The Gift Ban Act restricted gifts to elected officials and banned the use of campaign funds for personal use. The Ethics Act not only eliminated some highly publicized exemptions allowed in the Gift Ban Act but also required ethics training for all state employees and required each constitutional officer to appoint an executive inspector general to review complaints of wrongdoing.

However, untouched in those major

laws of 1998 and 2003 were contribution limits and pay-to-play. While the bill restricting state contractors from making campaign contributions is advancing through the Illinois House this year, Chicago Democratic Rep. Harry Osterman's contribution limits bill remains in committee. That measure would limit individuals to \$1,500 in contributions to legislative candidates and \$3,000 to statewide candidates. It also would cap the contributions of corporations, unions and associations at \$5,000. Like contribution limit proposals of recent years, it may never be released for a vote.

Yet it appears the public is paying more attention. Ryan's indictment and conviction on charges of political corruption helped to broaden the public debate from campaign finance issues to political ethics in general. A poll by Belden, Russonello & Stewart last October indicated that 73 percent of Illinois residents believe that "unless we limit the influence of money in government, elected officials will not be able to keep their promises on issues that are important to people like me."

That view is virtually unchanged from a survey the Illinois Campaign Finance Project conducted in the mid-1990s. "Illinois is seriously ill, suffering from overexposure to political money," the final report, *Tainted Democracy*, concluded in 1997. "The illness may not be fatal, but it is debilitating and disfiguring. It makes us weak, and it makes us look bad."

The project's task force, co-chaired by former U.S. Sen. Paul Simon and former Gov. William Stratton, recommended 19 changes in Illinois law. Ten of those have been enacted. Of the nine untouched recommendations, six deal with limits on campaign contributions, which exist for federal elections and in most states, but not in Illinois. Thus, a huge cloud still hangs over this state, with lobbyists, businesses and other players left to wonder whether they will get access to politicians or state contracts if they don't give enough money to the right people.

"People with money and power use our democratic process to add to their power and wealth," Simon and Stratton wrote in the report's preface. "People without large amounts of money increasingly feel left

A decade after that report, political money is still making us look bad, and there's no question that fundraising demands and practices are keeping good people from entering the political arena. That weakens and taints Illinois.

out and unrepresented by their own elected officials, and they feel powerless to change the system."

Those who have responded for the past decade by declaring all we need is more disclosure about contributions have no answer for why political money keeps strangling the Illinois political culture, despite immediate electronic access to campaign reports by the media and Illinois citizens. The disclosure-only philosophy has not curtailed the soiling effect of money in politics.

"If the governor and the legislature and other state leaders ignore the public's cry for help, people will feel even more disconnected from the electoral process," the authors of *Tainted Democracy* wrote. "The campaign finance system is so out of control that our life-blood, democracy, is tainted."

A decade after that report, political money is still making us look bad, and there's no question that fundraising demands and practices are keeping good people from entering the political arena. That weakens and taints Illinois. Coalitions to address the root problems are gaining strength, but pay-to-play is still the poster child in a state where democracy has become dollarocracy. □

Cynthia Canary of Chicago is director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, and Ed Wojcicki of Springfield is the former publisher of Illinois Issues.

Tainted Democracy can be found at www.ilcampaign.org under campaign finance reform.

Illinois GOP chooses presidential camps

• Illinois House Minority Leader **Tom Cross** of Oswego and businessman **Ron Gidwitz** of Chicago are co-chairing the Illinois campaign for presidential hopeful **Rudy Giuliani**.

Cross, an attorney, is serving his eighth term in state office. Gidwitz, who helped found a Chicago investment firm, served as chairman of the Illinois State Board of Education and lost a bid for governor in 2006. Giuliani is the former New York mayor who became *Time* magazine's Person of the Year for his response to the September 11 terrorist attacks on the city.

• State Rep. **Jim Durkin** of Western Springs is serving as national legislative co-chair of U.S. Sen. **John McCain**'s presidential campaign, while Sen. Minority Leader **Frank Watson** of Greenville is McCain's chairman of legislators.

Durkin, a former Cook County prosecutor and assistant attorney general of Illinois, joined the General Assembly in 1995. He also co-chaired McCain's 2000 presidential campaign in Illinois. Watson leads the Senate Republican Caucus and previously served as assistant majority leader from 1993 to 2002. He has served in the Senate for 25 years and served four years in the House.

McCain, a fourth-term U.S. senator, is a U.S. Navy veteran and a former Vietnam prisoner of war. He lost the 2000 primary to President George W. Bush.

BIG PEOPLE ON CAMPUS

William Perry will become the new president of Eastern Illinois University in Charleston on July 1. He replaces **Louis Hencken**, who will retire from the post he's held since 2001.

Perry was at Texas A&M University, where he served 36 years, most recently as vice provost. A math professor, he earned his bachelor's degree in math and history from Park College in Missouri. He earned his master's and doctorate in math from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

UIS grad assists the president with press

Dana Perino, deputy assistant to President George W. Bush and interim White House press secretary, graduated from a University of Illinois at Springfield journalism program before landing on Capitol Hill.

She received her master's degree in Public Affairs Reporting. She earned her degree in 1995 by interning in the Statehouse Press Corps for WCIA-TV, a CBS affiliate based in Champaign.

Perino says she still uses the knowledge gained from a

campaign finance course taught by Kent Redfield. "I really thought that was beneficial," she says. "I use that a lot in my day-to-day life here in understanding how it works."

However, she decided the Midwest and journalism weren't for her.

She spent nearly four years as press secretary to former Colorado U.S. Rep. Dan Schaefer. After September 11, 2001, she became a press officer for the U.S. Department of Justice, where she worked on terrorism and was assigned to the environment and natural resources division. She then spent more than two years working for the president's Council on Environmental Quality before becoming White House deputy press secretary in 2005. She began filling in for press secretary Tony Snow in late March when he announced he needed to take time off to confront a recurrence of cancer.

"We didn't have an option of sitting around and being sad because, one, Tony wouldn't have wanted that but, two, the necessities of the job," Perino says. "The news goes on, and we have to respond."

From her Washington, D.C., home last month, she said she took a day off from the "extremely early hours and a very intense pace."

But, she says, "You'd be surprised. It really is quite a typical day. You don't know what you're going to deal with, but your schedule's pretty regimented."

Up at 4:30 a.m. to exercise, she arrives at the White House by 6:15 a.m. to read all the national newspapers and attend three communications meetings before 9 a.m. She conducts a daily "gaggle" media availability before meeting with the president. Another daily press briefing happens around noon before the "witching hour, when reporters are on deadline and you never know what's going to happen." Her workdays usually end around 8 p.m.

She's also watching the 2008 presidential race. "We won't weigh in until there's a nomination chosen," she says. "So it's kind of fun to sit back and watch. On the other hand, it's also a challenge because it's taking up a lot of space in the newspaper."

Although she says she never expected to work with President Bush on a daily basis, she always liked politics and wanted to work for a Republican president. "I really enjoy the president's company," she says.



Dana Perino

State patronage chief resigns

Joseph Cini left the governor's patronage office last month. Gov. Rod Blagojevich's spokeswoman told the *Chicago Tribune* Cini left the Intergovernmental Affairs Office for the private sector. According to the *Tribune*, Cini is linked to a federal investigation into the administration's hiring and contracting practices and was cited in a scathing report written by the governor's first executive inspector general.

Former Daley aide is indicted

Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's former top aide, retired Streets and Sanitation Commissioner **Alfred Sanchez**, was indicted on federal charges in connection with the ongoing investigation of city hiring and promotions. Sanchez also was a principal organizer with the Hispanic Democratic Organization, a Chicago political campaign.

According to the U.S. attorney's office in Chicago, Sanchez was indicted for scheming to provide city jobs, promotions and other employment benefits to induce and reward political campaign work between 1994 and 2005. The indictment says Sanchez received help from Chicago policeman **Aaron Delvalle**, who was indicted on federal charges of perjury for lying to investigators about his activity with the Hispanic Democratic Organization.

Four high-ranking city officials from the mayor's patronage office were sentenced in the same investigation last year. Sanchez and Delvalle bring the total charged to 48 since January 2004, according to the U.S. attorney's office.

Daley hasn't been charged in the federal investigation.

Conservation group makes a change



Bruce Boyd

Bruce Boyd, director of the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy, stepped down to take a position with Washington, D.C.-based Arabella Philanthropic Investment Advisors. That group helps philanthropists get the most value for their charitable donations. Boyd will open a Chicago office.

Serving as interim director is **Michael Reuter**, director of the conservancy's Great Rivers Partnership.

The environmental group is celebrating 50 years of conservation work in Illinois that started with the preservation of Volo Bog in Lake County. Other projects include Nachusa Grasslands, the Cache River Basin and Emiquon.

QUOTABLES

“He is probably the best prosecutor in the nation, certainly one of them. It casts total doubt on the whole process.”

Former U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White of Manhattan in the Chicago Tribune responding to a report that Patrick Fitzgerald, U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, was ranked by the Justice Department as being among prosecutors who had “not distinguished themselves” and were slated to be fired.

“He’s either going to be remembered by history as the mayor who presided over the last big-city clout machine or the mayor who fixed it. This gives him a chance to fix it.”

Michael Shakman in the Chicago Tribune commenting on the agreement by Mayor Richard Daley’s administration on a settlement ending federal oversight of City Hall hiring. Shakman sued the city over political patronage more than 30 years ago.

BIT

Carolyn Adams

The Illinois Lottery superintendent since May 2003 died March 26 after a long battle with breast cancer.

She was 44.

She oversaw the launch of two scratch-off games to benefit services for breast cancer

survivors and for veterans.



Carolyn Adams

Since 2005, Ticket for the Cure raised more than \$3 million for breast cancer research, prevention, detection and treatment. Veterans Cash, initiated by Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn last year, raised more than \$3.2 million for health care and home assistance for veterans.

Adams also helped the agency achieve three consecutive years of record sales, increasing them by \$403 million and reaching just under \$2 billion in 2006.

Senate President Emil Jones Jr. issued a statement calling her a friend and a dedicated public servant whose work at the Lottery helped dedicate more money to the state's education system.

Adams grew up in Chicago's South Side Roseland community and spent two years at Illinois State University in Bloomington. She earned her bachelor's degree in communications from Columbia College Chicago. Before joining the Lottery, she handled sales and marketing for various Chicago media outlets.

She was a member of the Chicago Urban League and the RainbowPush Coalition, was active in Chicago's Principal for a Day program and served as a board member of the Open Book Federation.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich's statement called her a “rising star” whose optimism and grace were inspiring. “She won the love and respect of everyone she knew with her energy and creativity — not just in the professional world, but in every part of her life.”

Correction

Courtney Flint, project director for a study of Community Emergency Response Teams (see April, page 14), was incorrectly identified. She is an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which supports the research.

Write us

Your comments are welcome. Please keep them brief (250 words). We reserve the right to excerpt them.



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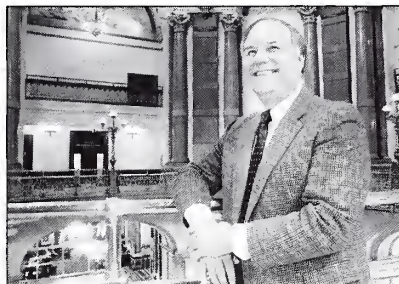
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Charles N. Wheeler III



A legislative measure would end most regulation of new wired video service

by Charles N. Wheeler III

"When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled."

African proverb

In the legislative battle now under way between two heavyweight industries — the telephone companies and the cable television providers — what's at risk of getting trampled is the public interest.

The focus of the intense struggle is a telecom-backed measure that would strip franchising control from local governments and do away with most regulation for new entrants into the lucrative field of providing wired video service, long dominated by cable companies. As cable providers have started to offer telephone service, though, traditional phone companies have begun fighting back with plans for video over their landlines.

Led by AT&T, the phone companies argue that Illinois consumers are being gouged by the near-monopoly on video that cable companies like Comcast now enjoy, a competitive advantage owing in part to the need for would-be video providers to negotiate franchise agreements with every locality they wish to serve.

Under the pending legislation, providers no longer would have to deal with city officials. Instead, they could seek authorization from the Illinois Commerce Commission to provide video wherever they choose. Proponents say allowing the telecoms unfettered access to local markets will unleash competition

Under the pending legislation, providers no longer would have to deal with city officials.

that will drive down prices, attract more investment to Illinois and create thousands of new, high-tech jobs.

The cable industry responds, quite accurately, that nothing now prevents AT&T, Verizon or other telephone companies from competing for the video business under the existing rules by negotiating the same sort of franchise agreements that cable providers have with cities and villages across the state. The telecom proposal, the cable guys say, is merely a way for Ma Bell's offspring to avoid locally set service standards and to serve only those neighborhoods most likely to sign up for the most-expensive packages with lots of bells and whistles.

Fearful of being caught underfoot are the folks who run the community-based, public, educational and government channels, referred to as PEGs. They typically broadcast such fare as school board meetings, city council sessions, community arts events and educational programming.

Equally concerned are local government officials, who worry about losing

control over the public rights of way in their communities and losing their ability to set service standards for the new video providers, including requiring that service be offered throughout the community.

Lawmakers face a tough challenge in sorting out fact from the public relations spin employed by the competing corporate interests. A key point to remember, though, is that neither the telecoms nor the cable companies should be expected to have the public interest at heart. After all, big corporations are supposed to make as much money as possible for shareholders. Looking out for the little guy — John Q. Public — is government's job, and it should be a top priority for elected officials.

To his credit, the telecom bill's chief sponsor, Rep. James Brosnahan, an Oak Lawn Democrat, already has removed some of the measure's more troublesome points and has been negotiating with the community groups and local officials in an effort to allay some of their other concerns.

To safeguard the public interest, however, lawmakers should focus on a couple of critical issues:

- Protecting the existing network of public access channels, including encouraging their future growth. Telecom allies profess their commitment to public access, citing a provision of the measure that earmarks 1 percent of receipts to underwrite PEGs. But public access

stations in some communities enjoy higher levels of funding, which would be slashed by a statewide 1 percent cap.

Moreover, cable providers now foot the bill for hooking up the public access stations to their systems and carry the signal for free. In contrast, AT&T would like PEGs to buy the equipment needed to make their signal compatible with the phone company's technology, then pay AT&T for carrying it. And the phone company initially planned to provide a lower quality picture for PEGs — akin to a YouTube image in a computer window — rather than the full-screen TV picture viewers expect.

Advocates argue, correctly, that new entrants into video service should be required to play by the same public access rules as cable providers. That means no funding cuts, no freeze on future PEGs, no new carriage charges and no second-rate picture quality.

- Assuring that local governments maintain control over the use of public property by private business. Even if one accepts the premise that the state should

Advocates argue, correctly, that new entrants into video service should be required to play by the same public access rules as cable providers.

issue video licenses to all comers, that's no reason to allow the telecoms to stick the refrigerator-size boxes needed for their technology where they see fit. Local regulation of equipment placement is important for public safety — think clear sight lines at intersections.

Local officials also generally have done a good job of requiring cable providers to offer service to everyone within the franchise area, thus avoiding so-called "cherry picking" in which only affluent, or demographically desirable, neighborhoods are covered. The telecoms say they want everyone for a customer, but mandating 100 percent build-out is bad

business practice. At the least, though, lawmakers should set a goal of universal build-out, with reporting and enforcement provisions to stop technological redlining.

Similarly, the legislation sets out demanding standards for consumer protection, like resolving billing disputes, requiring prompt service calls and barring excessive fees, the familiar consumer headaches. All commendable, but equally necessary is oversight and enforcement, somewhere an aggrieved customer can complain, short of suing the provider, and get a fair shake. Perhaps the ICC's role could be expanded beyond mere pro forma license issuance; even better, the attorney general could be given the job.

The ultimate goal in the telecommunications war is to become a customer's sole provider of video, telephone and broadband Internet service. Lawmakers should watch out for the broader public interest along the way. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

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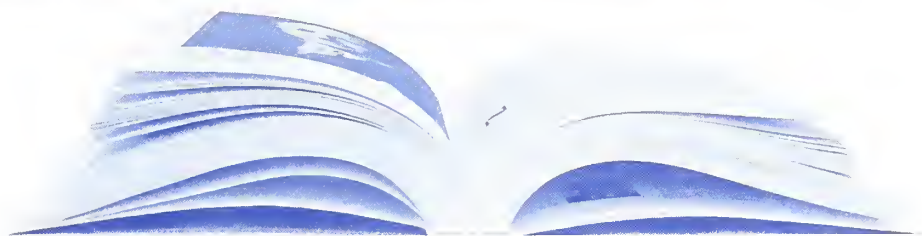
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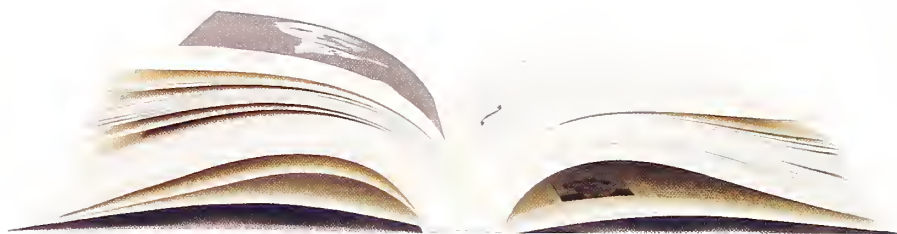
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